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CORRECTION: The review of Sartre's **Les Sequestres d'Altona** in the Fall, 1962 issue was by Robert Hunter Wilbur, not Richard Wilbur. Our apologies to both writers.

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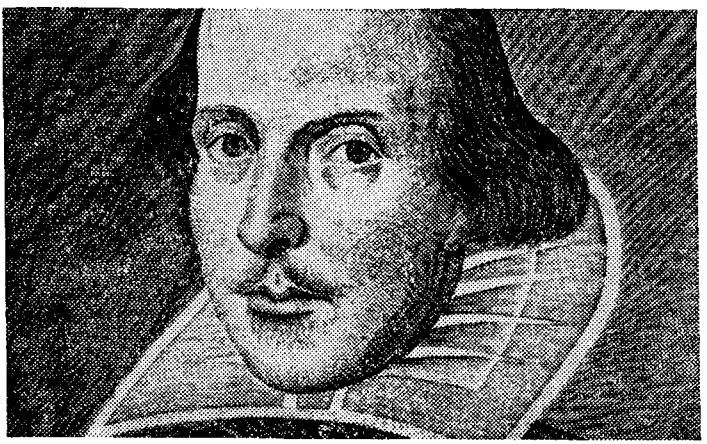

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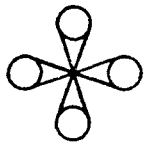

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Ralph Ellison

IT ALWAYS BREAKS OUT

What a country, what a world! I don't know which was the more outrageous, the more scandalous—the burning of the Cadillac on the senator's beautiful lawn, the wild speech made by the arsonist while the beautiful machine smoked and glowed in flames, or the crowd's hysterical reaction to the weird, flamboyant sacrifice. I know only that I have neither the power nor the will to convey the incident to Monsieur Vannec. How can I, when I've been unable to frame it for myself? To hell with the inquisitive Frenchman, there is simply too much unexpected chaos involved, too many unsettling contradictions have appeared. Besides, I refuse to reveal to him that I'm so much without presence before a phenomenon of my own country. It is a matter of pride: personal, intellectual, national. And especially is this true when I consider Vannec's passionate need to define all phenomena—whether social, political or cultural—and codify them and reduce them to formulae—intricate ones—that can be displayed in the hard sparkling center of a crystal paperweight.

And speaking of paper, how should I explain the manner in which the car burning was handled by the press? How the newspapers reduced the event to a small item which stated simply that a deranged jazz musician had set fire to his flashy automobile on the senator's lawn—with all references to his wild speech and the crowd's reaction omitted? And here is the shameful part requiring an unwilling confession: I would have to tell Vannec that we, the newspapermen, members of the working press, champions of the reported fact who insist upon the absolute accessibility of the news, that we ourselves suppressed it, reduced it to insignificance by reflex and with no editorial urging whatsoever!

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Or at least we tried; but despite what we did the event has had, is having, its effect. It spreads by word of mouth, it imposes itself like a bad smell carried by the wind into private homes and into private conversations. Yes, and into our private thoughts. It balloons, it changes its shape, it grows. Worse, it seeps back into consciousness despite all we do to forget it. And we, remember, are tough-minded newspapermen.

Get this: a group of us met that evening to eat and drink and chat—just as we've done once a week for quite some time. Sometimes we exchange information and discuss that part of the news which, for one reason or another, is considered untimely or unfit to print. Often, as on this occasion, we enjoy our private jokes at the expense of some public figure or incident which, in reporting, we find expedient to treat with formal propriety. But tonight our mood was light, almost gay. Or at least it seemed so at the beginning. We were delighted that at last one of the senator's butts had succeeded in answering him, if only briefly and at outrageous expense. But beneath our banter we were somewhat uneasy. The wildman Negro jazzman had made us so. Certainly there was no other reason for it—unless it was the intimate knowledge which each of us possessed of our filed accounts. Otherwise why the uneasy undertone as we relaxed there in the brightly lighted dining room with its sparkle of silver and crystal, its sheen of rich woods, its tinkle of iced glasses and buzz of friendly talk? The very paintings on the wall, scenes of early life on the then remote frontier, moody, misty scenes of peaceful life in great forest clearings, formal portraits of the nineteenth-century founders of the club—all made for a sense of security. Even Sam, our inscrutable but familiar Negro waiter, was part of a ritual. And while I don't mean to imply that the club is a great place, it is a good place indeed, and its food and drink are excellent; its atmosphere, resonant with historical associations and warmly civilized values, most relaxing.

But tonight, as I say, something was working within each of us and it was just after Sam's dark hands had served the second round of after-dinner drinks, placed clean ashtrays before us and withdrawn, that Wiggins, the economics expert, released it.

"What," he said, "do you think of the new style in conspicuous consumption?"

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And there it was, right out in the open, wearing a comic disguise. We laughed explosively, not so much at his remark but at ourselves, at the quick summoning up of what lay beneath our calm.

"It was a lulu," Thompson said, "a real lulu."

"Where on earth did that fellow come from?" Wilson said.

"From Chattanooga. He rose up like a wave of heat from the Jeff Davis highway," Wilkins said. "Didn't you hear him say it?"

"I wasn't there," Wiggins said, "but when I heard of it I thought, *Thorstein Veblen, your theory has been carried to the tenth power!*"

"And in horse power," I said. "Wiggins, you always said that Veblen was the comedian of economics. Now I'm beginning to understand."

"That's right, he was an ironist, a humorist of economic theory," Wiggins said, "and all he needed to make that clear was to have had that black boy illustrate his books."

"The learned doctor would have flipped," Larkin said.

"Did you ever see anything like it, a man burning his own car before an audience?"

"He's as wild as those rich Oklahoma Indians who preferred to travel in hook-and-ladder fire trucks or brand new hearses instead of limousines," Wiggins said.

"Yes," I said, "but that was a cultural preference. The Indians were really living in a different world, but this fellow today must have been mad. Off his rocker."

"Just leave it to the senator," Wilson said. "If there's something outrageous to be brought out in people he's the man to do it."

"It'll be interesting to see what this will bring out of the insurance people," Larkin said.

"They'll be wild."

"Man, they're already rewriting their policies!"

"Well, I'll bet no one is as wild as the senator," Thompson said. "He's probably searching for laws to rewrite."

"Can you blame him, that boy tried to tie a knot in his tail."

"Yeah," McGowan said, "ole senator was up there cooking up a barbecue for his v.i.p. guests and here comes a Nigra straight out of nowhere to prepare the hot sauce!"

"I wouldn't be too sure about how the senator is taking it," I

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said. "I wouldn't be surprised if he isn't sitting in his study right this minute laughing his head off."

"He's baited those people so often that he shouldn't mind when one answers back."

"The senator is an actor," I said, "nothing seems to touch him."

"He's a thick-skinned scoundrel," said Larkin, "a thick-skinned, brilliant scoundrel and a joker."

"Well, that colored fellow really tried to cap his joke. What is this country coming to? A United States senator stands on the floor of the senate and allows himself the license of saying that so many Negro citizens are driving Cadillac cars that he suggests that the name, the trade mark, be changed to the *Coon Cage Eight*—imagine! And as though that weren't scandalous enough, hardly before the news is on the air, a Negro drives an expensive Cadillac onto the senator's grounds and in rebuttal sets it afire! What on earth are we coming to?"

"The senator's a joker, the Negro is a joker, this is a nation of jokers. We aren't coming, we've arrived. Welcome to the United States of Jokeocracy."

"Hell, that was no joke, not the car. That fellow was dead serious."

"The point that interests me," Wilson said, "is that a fellow like that was willing to pay for it. He probably decided that he'd do anything to get back at the senator and this was the damndest way he could find. If I were the senator I'd reflect on that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it's possible that someone else might decide to call him, and in a more personal way. In fact, I'm surprised that he hasn't provoked someone long before today . . ."

Wilson's voice faded into his thinking and then just as the swift, barely-formed idea flashed into my own mind, Wilson looked around the table, frowning.

"Say," he said, "have we ever had a Negro assassin?"

I looked at him, open-mouthed. It was as though the words had been transferred from my mind to his. I held my breath. Past Wilson's shoulder and far across the room I could see Sam, standing with folded arms. Several pitchers of iced water and a large white crock piled high with iced squares of butter rested on the stand

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beside him while he glanced casually down the long sweep of the room to where a girl moved gracefully through the door. Her red hair flowed in waves to the shoulders of her white suit and she carried a large blue bag and I thought, *Hail Columbia, long may she wave.* . . . Then I heard Thompson saying,

"You mean in the *United States?*"

"That's right," Wilson said, "have we?"

"Now why on earth would you think of that," I said.

"It just struck me. I don't know. But after today maybe it's time we started thinking about such possibilities . . ."

McGowan made a cage of his fat fingers and lowered them around his drink. "What Wilson means, gentlemen, is that a Nigra who'd burn a Cadillac car would do just about anything. He means that a Nigra like that'll burn good United States currency."

We smiled. McGowan could be amusing about Negroes but we would have liked it better had he not been a Southerner. Somehow they obsessed him and he was constantly sounding off over something they did to disturb his notion of a well-ordered society. And now that I could feel him working up a disquisition on the nature and foibles of the Negro I was glad that Sam was far across the room. McGowan took a drink, sighed and smiled.

"Well, Wilson, I have to agree: that was *quite* a Nigra. But you all don't have to go into any brainstorm to analyze what that Nigra was doing. I'm here to tell you that what the Nigra was doing was running a-muck! His brain snapped, that's what happened; and far as he was concerned he was back up a tree throwing coconuts."

Across from me Wilson was still frowning, looking like a man remembering a bad dream. McGowan's humor wasn't reaching me either.

"I'm serious," Wilson said. "Has there ever been one?"

"I've been thinking about it," Larkin said. "There were McKinley, Roosevelt—Cermac that is, Huey Long—but none of the assassins were colored."

"A Nigra *assassin,*" McGowan said, "Are y'all getting drunk already?"

"There might have been a few local killings with a political motive," Thompson said. "Here and there over the years some small town Southern politician might have been shot or knifed. Like that

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fellow down in Louisiana who made the mistake of getting into a colored man's bed and allowed himself to get caught. But you wouldn't call that political. That was sheer bad judgment and I'd have shot the bastard myself . . ."

"I say, are y'all getting drunk?" McGowan said.

"Come to think about it though," Thompson went on, "how can you tell when those people are doing something politically significant? Down home not enough of them vote and here in the North so few take a part in civic affairs that it's hard to tell what they're up to. We just don't know enough about them for all the statistics we have. We don't have, or *they* don't have, enough social forms through which we can see them with any clarity."

"Forms?" McGowan said, "What forms? We don't need any cotton-picking forms! Don't you Yankees recognize that everything the Nigra *does* is political? Thompson, you amaze me. You are Southern born and bred and there are three things we Southerners are supposed to know about and they're history, politics—and Nigras. And especially do we know about the political significance of the Nigra."

"Oh drop it, McGowan," Thompson said, "I'm being serious."

"No sir, I beg to differ," McGowan said, *"I'm* being serious; *you're* being Yankee frivolous. Gentlemen, will y'all grant me a few minutes?"

"Grant you?" Wilkins said. "Hell, you can't talk without making a filibuster. So go on, get it over with."

"Thank you kindly. Gentlemen, I'm going to tell you once and for all, I'm going to impress upon you once and for all, the fact that everything the Nigra does is political. I don't like to take up so sobering a matter so early in the evening but some of us here are getting too drunk too soon . . ."

"Do you mean 'everything' literally?" Wiggins said.

"I mean *everything,"* McGowan said. "And especially things which you Yankees would pass over as insignificant. We can start at random. Listen: If you catch a Nigra in the wrong section of town after dark—he's being political because he knows he's got no business being there. If he brushes against a white man on the street or on a stairway, that's very political. Because every once in a while the Nigras get together and organize these 'bumping cam-

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paigns' against the white folks. They'll try to knock you off the sidewalk and break your ribs and then they'll beg your pardon as though it was an accident, when we know damn well that it was politics.

"So watch the Nigra's face. If a Nigra rolls his eyes and pokes out his mouth at you—that's downright subversive. If he puts on aristocratic airs—watch him! If he talks about moving up North, he's being political again. Because we know for a fact that the Nigras are moving North in keeping with a long-range plan to seize control of the American government. If he talks too loud on the street or talks about sending his kids up North to college in your presence, or if he buys a tractor—all this is political. Be especially wary of the Nigra who tries to buy himself a bulldozer so he can compete against white men because that is one of the most dangerous political acts of all. A Nigra like that is out to knock down Southern tradition and bury it, lock stock and barrel. He's worse than a whole herd of carpetbaggers or seven lean years of bollweevils. Waiter," he called to Sam, "bring us another round!" and then to us, "There's absolutely nothing to dry a man out like trying to educate a bunch of Yankees."

As I watched Sam approach, I became uneasy that McGowan in his excitement would offend him. After all, I had learned during the Thirties to respect the sensibilities of his people and to avoid all anti-minority stereotypes and clichés. One simply didn't laugh at unfortunates—within their hearing. But if Sam was aware of our conversation his face revealed nothing.

"Hy ya, Sam," McGowan said.

"Fine, Mr. McGowan," Sam said, and looking around the table, "Gentlemen?"

And we ordered, after which Sam slipped away.

"Let me tell y'all something else," McGowan went one. "If you catch a Nigra buying his food and clothing from the wrong dealer—or worse, if he goes to another town to trade, that's Nigra politics *pretending* to be Nigra economics. That's something for you to think about, Wiggins. If a Nigra owns more than one shotgun, rifle, or pistol, it's political. If he forgets to say 'sir' to a white man or tries to talk Yankee talk or if he drives too doggone slow or too doggone fast, or if he comes up with one of these little bug-eyed foreign cars —all these things are political and don't you forget it!"

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McGowan paused. Sam was crossing the floor with a tray of drinks, which he placed before us and left.

"Come on, educate us some more," Thompson said. "Then we can talk seriously."

McGowan's eyes twinkled. "I'd be glad to. But if you think this isn't serious, study history. For instance, if a Nigra buys his woman a washing machine—watch him, he's dangerous! And if he gets her a clothes dryer and a dishwasher—put that Nigra under the jail for trying to undercut our American way of life. You all can smile if you want to but things like that are most political. In fact, there are few things in this world as political as a black Nigra woman owning her own washing machine.

"Now don't laugh about it. You Yankees must remember that the Industrial Revolution was *revolutionary,* because if y'all don't the Nigra does, and he never stops scheming to make it more so. So verily verily I say unto you Yankees: Watch the Nigra who owns more than one T.V. because he's getting too ambitious and that's bound to lead him into politics. What's more, if you allow the Nigra to see Indians killing white folks week after week—which is another Yankee mistake—he's apt to go bad and the next thing you know he's learning about that Nehru, Nasser, and those Mau-Maus and that's most politically unwise. It doesn't matter that the Indians are always defeated because the Nigra has the feeling deep down that *he* can win. After all, Nigras are Southern too.

"And I'll tell you something else: If his woman or his gal chillun come up wearing blonde wigs, or if they dye their kinky Nigra hair red, you might think it amusing but I know that those Nigra women are being defiantly political. On the other hand, if they *stop* straightening their hair in the old Southern darky tradition and start wearing it short and natural like those African Nigras—right there you have you a bunch of homegrown Nigras who're on the way to being hopelessly contaminated. Those Nigras are sweating and breathing politics. Call Edgar Hoover!

"Watch the papers the Nigra reads, especially if you see him subscribing to the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times.* Watch him closely if he gets interested in the stock market. Because such a Nigra is power hungry and the next thing you know he'll want to vote and run for public office. . . ."

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"There," Wiggins said, "that's what really worries you, isn't it?"

McGowan shook his head.

"I wouldn't say that. Although I'll admit that between a Nigra making big money and getting the vote, money is the lesser evil. A Nigra millionaire—once you can stomach the idea—is a pretty safe Nigra. Because if the old saying is still true that there's nothing more timid than a million bucks, then a million *Nigra* bucks are bound to be ten times as afraid. So don't worry about the Nigra millionaire; he's just a Nigra with more money than he knows how to spend. Ever hear of one endowing a college or building a library, setting up a scientific laboratory? Hell no!"

"I'm glad to learn that there's at least *something* about the Negro which isn't political," Thompson said.

"There is, but not too much," McGowan said. "Because the Nigra is a *political* animal. He came out of Africa that way. He makes politics the same way a dirt dauber makes mud houses or a beaver builds dams. So watch his environment. If you see his woman putting up pictures on the wall—regard her with suspicion because she's liable to break out in a *rash* of politics.

"If a Nigra joins the Book-of-the-Month Club or the Great Books program—investigate him. Because when a Nigra gets hold to such deals they become more political than *Das Kapital* and the Communist Manifesto put together. There was a time when everybody thought that the Bible was the only book that a Nigra should be allowed to read, but now I be damned if he hasn't even made the Good Book political.

"So I counsel you to watch your educated Nigra. If he reads Bill Shakespeare, that's all right because no Nigra who ever lived would know how to apply the Bard—not even that big, stupid buck Nigra, Othello, who was so dumb that when his poor, dear, sweet little wife, Desdemona, dropped her kotex in the wrong place and he heard about it, right away he thinks in his ignorant Nigra fashion that she's allowed somebody to tamper with her and he lets that nasty Italian bastard—what's-his-name—confuse him and agitate him into taking her life. Poor little thing. No sir, no Nigra born has ever been up to dealing with Bill Shakespeare. But if you catch you a Nigra reading that lowdown, Nigra-loving Bill Faulkner and *liking* him, there you have you a politically dangerous, integrationist Nigra!"

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"Why do you specify his *liking* what he reads?" Thompson said.

"That's the kind of question for a Yankee to ask, not you; because you're suppose to know that any sensible Nigra would get scaird spitless reading what that fellow Faulkner writes. He's more dangerous to our tradition than a bulldozer.

"But now let's look into another area. You want to watch what the Nigra eats because it has been established that some Nigra foods are political while others are not. And it's a proven fact that the moment the Nigra changes his diet he gets dissatisfied and restless. So watch what he eats. Fat meat, cornbread, lima beans, ham hocks, chitterlings, watermelon, blackeyed peas, molasses, collard greens, buttermilk and clabber, neckbones and red beans and rice, hominy, both grit and lye hominy—these are traditional foods and healthy for the Nigra and *usually*—and I stress the *usually*—not political . . ."

"What about chicken," Larkin said, "you overlooked chicken."

"Chicken is no problem," McGowan said. "It's traditional and harmless in the political sense—unless, of course, a wrong-headed political Nigra is caught stealing one. And even so, there's nothing necessarily political about a Nigra stealing a chicken. In fact, down South we agree that a Nigra's suppose to steal him a chicken every now and then and the only crime involved is in his getting caught.

"But," McGowan said, holding up his hand and allowing it to slap the table, *Pow! "lobster* is out!"

Wiggins sputtered over his drink. "Oh Lord," he said. "Oh Lord protect us!"

"Gentlemen, I tell you truly, lobster on a Nigra's table is political as hell. Lobster gives him false courage. It puts rocks in his Nigra jaws and wild ideas in his Nigra brain. In short, lobster, any kind of lobster, broiled, boiled, fried, fradiavalloed—serve it anyway you damn please—lobster simply messes a Nigra *up*. If the price of lobster ever hits bottom this country will have bad trouble.

"And watch the rascal if he develops a taste for T-bone steaks, cornish hens, sweetbreads, calves liver (although pig liver is traditional and O.K.), parsnips, artichokes, venison, or quiche lorraine—he's been under bad influences and getting political again. Therefore it's a good idea to watch what he does with traditional foods. For instance, if he starts to baking his pigs feet in cheese cloth instead of boiling

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them naked in the Southern Nigra fashion—right there you have a potentially bad Nigra on your hands.

"And don't overlook the political implications of a Nigra eating too much Chinese, Japanese or Jewish food. Call the F.B.I. if you catch him buying French wines, German beer or drinks like Aquavit or Pernod. One time down in New Orleans a Nigra drank a glass of that Pernod and went straight down to the court house and cussed out the judge, a distinguished Cayjun, in French! Nigras who drink such liquors have jumped the reservation and are out to ruin this nation.

"Scotch whiskey is just as bad. A Nigra doesn't even have to have heard about Bonny Prince Charlie, but let him start drinking Scotch whiskey and he swears he's George Washington's great-great-grandson and the rightful head of the United States Government. And not only that, a Nigra who switches to Scotch after being brought up on good corn and bourbon is putting on airs, has forgotten his place and is in implicit rebellion. Besides, have you ever considered what would happen to our liquor industry if all the Nigras switched to drinking Scotch? A calamity! a catastrophe!"

McGowan leaned forward, lowering his voice confidentially, his eyes intense.

"At this point I want to get on to other aspects of the subject but before I do let me remark on one of the meanest, lowdownest forms of Nigra politics I have observed, and one which I mention among a bunch of gentlemen only with the greatest reluctance. That's when a sneaky, ornery, smart-alecky Nigra stands up in a crowd of peaceful, well-meaning white folks, who've gathered together in a public place to see Justice done, and that Nigra ups and breaks wind!

"I was attending a murder trial once and just as the judge was charging the jury, some politically subversive Nigra standing way back in the rear of the courtroom—because that's *exactly* where it came from—he let loose, and gentlemen, all at once the courthouse is in an uproar. Folks are standing up protesting and complaining, ladies are fanning themselves and fainting and the flabbergasted judge is fairly beating his gavel to a frazzle ordering the windows thrown open and the courtroom cleared. It was simply what you call a *mess*. And in all that disruptive atmosphere the poor jury gets so confused that not only is the case thrown out of court but the guilty

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Nigra standing trial goes scot free! And would you believe it, that nasty rascal didn't even have himself a lawyer!"

"The hell you say!" Wiggins roared.

"It's sad, gentlemen," McGowan said as we sputtered for breath, "but it's true. You simply have to be constantly alert and vigilant against Nigra politics because it can break out in a thousand forms. For instance, when you find a Nigra boy looking at these so-called 'girlie' magazines that flagrantly display naked white womanhood—which is something else you Yankees are responsible for—whip his head. Because when a Nigra starts looking at that type magazine he's long gone along the road laid down by those Japs who broke the white man's power in Asia by ordering their soldiers to sleep with every white trash whore gal they could lay their filthy yalla hands on. In the eyes of a Nigra boy all such photographs and cartoons become insidiously political . . ."

"Oh come now," someone said.

"You wonder why?" McGowan thrust forth his jaw, his eyes burning. "Because they undermine the white man's mastery, and over-expose the white woman's mystery; that's why. They show the buck Nigra everything we've been working three hundred years to keep concealed. You have to remember that those renaissance fellows had nothing on the American Nigra except power! With him even *poon* tang is a political instrument! So you think about it.

"Now Thompson here was talking about our not having any 'forms' through which we can see what the Nigra is up to politically and I've been demonstrating that he's mistaken. But he's right to the extent that the Nigra hasn't developed any forms of his own. He's just copied the white man and twisted what he copied to fit the Nigra taste. But he does have his own Nigra church, and his own Nigra religion, and the point I want to make is that he gets *political* according to his religion. Did you ever hear that explained before?"

"*I* haven't," I said.

"I know it. None of you have; so I'll go on and tell you. Baptist Nigras and Methodist Nigras and Holy Roller Nigras are O.K. Even Seven Day Adventist Nigras are all right—even though they're a bit strange even to other Nigras. All these Nigra religions are O.K. But you have got to watch the Nigra who changes *from* Baptist *to* Episcopalian *or* Catholic. Because that is a Nigra who has gone

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ambitious and turned his back on the South. And make no mistake, that Nigra isn't searching for God, no siree; he's looking for a political scantling to head-whip you with.

"And watch the young Nigra who joins up with Father Divine. It's not the same as when a pore old-fashioned Nigra who's lost in the North gets homesick for the South and joins up; the young one is out to undermine society and is probably staying up nights scheming and praying and trying to get God on the Nigra side. Same thing when a Nigra becomes a Jew—who the hell ever heard of one of our *good* Nigras joining up with the Jews? When a Nigra does that he's political, subversive, unruly and probably over-sexed—even for a Nigra!

"Now what are some of the political aspects of the Nigra here in D.C.? Well, around here things are so out of hand, mongrelized and confused that I don't know where to begin, but here are a few manifestations: Nigras visiting white folks; walking or riding along the streets with white women; visiting the Congress; hanging around Abe Lincoln's monument; visiting white churches; carrying picket signs; sending delegations to see the President; carrying briefcases with real papers in them; Nigras wearing homburg hats and Chesterfield overcoats; hiring uniformed chauffeurs, especially if the chauffeur is white. All these things are political, because the Nigra who does them is dying to become a diplomat so that he can get assigned abroad from where he aims to monkey with our sovereign states rights.

"To these add those Nigras from Georgia and Mississippi who turn up wearing those African robes and turbans in an effort to break into white society and get closer to white folks. Gentlemen, there's nothing worse or more political than a Nigra who denies the United States of America because that is a Nigra who has not only turned his back on his mammy and pappy but has denied the South!

"Here are some other forms of Nigra politics which y'all have over-looked: these young buck Nigras going around wearing berets, beards and tennis shoes in the wintertime and whose britches are so doggone tight that they look like they're 'bout to bust out of them. They're not the same as the white boys who dress that way, they're politically dangerous and it's worse, in the long run, than letting a

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bunch of Nigras run around the Capital carrying loaded pistols. A law ought to be passed before something serious occurs.

"And be on watch for your quiet Nigra. Be very careful of the Nigra who's too quiet when other loud-mouthed Nigras—who are safe Nigras—are out sassing white folks on the street corners and in the Yankee press and over the Yankee radio and T.V. Never mind the loudmouths, they're like the little fyce dogs that bark at you when you approach the big gate and then, when you walk into the yard they run to lick your hand. Throw them a bone. But keep your eye on the quiet Nigra who watches every move the white man makes and studies it, because he's probably trying to think up a theory and a strategy and tactic to subvert something. . . ."

"But go back to the automobile," Wiggins said. "My father-in-law is a dealer and I think he needs instruction."

"I'm glad you reminded me," McGowan said. "Now I've told you about those little foreign cars but there's more to the political significance of Nigras and autos. Cadillacs *used* to be O.K. but after what that Nigra did today on Senator Sunraider's lawn, I'm not so positive. That doggone Nigra was trying to politicalize the Cadillac! Which proves again what I say about everything the Nigra does being potentially political. But once you grasp this fact you also have to watch the Nigra who doesn't want a Cadillac, because he can stand a heap of political analysis.

"And pay close attention to the Nigra who has the money to buy one but picks an Imperial instead. Likewise the Nigras who love English autos. Watch all Nigras who pick Jaguars, Humbers, and if you ever hear of one, Rolls Royces. Likewise those who go around bragging about the Nigra vote electing the president of the United States. Such Nigras are playing dirty politics even though they might not be able to vote themselves. Yes, and watch the Nigra who comes telling a white man about the Nigra's 'gross yearly income,' because there you have an arrogant, biggety Nigra who is right up in your face talking open politics and who thinks you don't recognize it. Unless of course, you're convinced that the Nigra is really trying to tell you that he knows how you and him can make some quick money. In such a case the Nigra is just trying to make a little hustle for himself, so make a deal with him and don't worry about it because

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that Nigra doesn't give a damn about anybody or anything except himself—while the other type is trying to intimidate you.

"Then there's the Nigra who reads the Constitution and the law books and *broods* over them. That's one of the most political types there is. And like unto him is the Nigra who scratches his behind when he talks to a white man instead of scratching his head in the traditional Southern Nigra manner—because even where the Nigra *scratches* is political!

"But gentlemen, let me hasten to say after this very brief and inadequate catalogue of Nigra political deviousness, that to my considerable knowledge no Nigra has ever even *thought* about assassinating anybody. And I'll tell y'all why: It was bred out of him years ago!"

Even as I laughed I watched the conflicting expressions moving back and forth across McGowan's broad face. It looked as though he wanted desperately to grin but like a postage stamp which had become too wet, the grin kept sliding in and out of position. And I in turn became agitated. My laughter—it was really hysteria—was painful. For I realized that McGowan was obsessed by history to the point of nightmare. He had the dark man confined in a package and this was the way he carried him everywhere, saw him in everything. But now, laughing, I realized that I envied McGowan and admitted to myself with a twinge of embarrassment, that some of the things he said were not only amusing but true. And perhaps the truth lay precisely in their being seen humorously. For McGowan said things about Negroes with absolute conviction which I dared not even think. Could it be that he was more honest than I, that his free expression of his feelings, his prejudices, made him freer than I? Could it be that his freedom to say what he felt about all that Sam the waiter symbolized actually made him freer than I? Suddenly I despised his power to make me feel buried fears and possibilities, his power to define so much of the reality in which I lived and which I seldom bothered to think about.

And was it possible that the main object of McGowan's passion was really an idea, the idea of a non-existent past rather than a living people?

"Yes, gentlemen," McGowan was saying. "The only way to

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protect yourself from the Nigra is to master politics and that you Yankees have never done because y'all have never studied the Nigra."

Across the room I watched Sam, his hands held behind him, smiling as he chatted pleasantly with a white-haired old gentleman. Were there Negroes like McGowan, I wondered. And what would they say about me? How completely did I, a liberal, ex-radical, northerner, dominate Sam's sense of life, his idea of politics? Absolutely, or not at all? Was he, Sam, prevented by some piety from confronting me in a humorous manner, as my habit of mind, formed during the radical Thirties, prevented me from confronting him; or did he, as some of my friends suspected, regard all whites through the streaming eyes and aching muscles of one continuous, though imperceptible and inaudible, belly laugh? *What the hell,* I thought, *is Sam's last name?*

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Robert Brustein

BRECHT AGAINST BRECHT

Of all the great modern dramatists, Bertolt Brecht is the most enigmatic—at once direct and hidden, at once simple and complex. The bulk of his work is designed to be an impersonal and schematic contribution to Marxist myth-making. Yet, despite his unambiguous commitment to the Communist cause throughout most of his career, Brecht is an extremely divided artist, whose works, for all their ideological intentions, remain peculiarly enticing and elusive. This reminds us of another Marxist dramatist, Bernard Shaw, and, superficially, Shaw would seem to be Brecht's closest companion in the theatre of revolt. Both support a "non-Aristotelian" theatre, characterized not by cathartic emotional effects but by preachment, protest, and persuasion. Both are absorbed with the materialistic motives behind human ideals. Outwardly both are social rebels, attempting the salvation of mankind through a change in the external environment. And both involuntarily overcome the narrow utilitarian limitations they impose on their art. Still, for all their surface similarities, Brecht is even further removed from Shaw, temperamentally, than Strindberg is from Ibsen. For whereas Shaw's revolt is modified by the geniality of his character and the meliorism of his social philosophy, Brecht's is intensified by his savage indignation and his harrowing vision of life. Shaw is a suppressed poet who rarely breaks the skin of the unconscious; and, though he calls himself a Puritan, he cannot bring himself to contemplate evil in the soul of man. But Brecht is a lyrical, dramatic, and satiric poet of fierce intensity; and few Calvinist theologians have been more

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fascinated than he with the brutal, the satanic, and the irrational aspects of human nature.

Brecht's obsession with the darker side of man stems from his struggles with his own character, and so does his relationship to ideology. For while Shaw's Fabianism is the extension of his cheerful, rationalistic personality, Brecht's Communism is a discipline imposed, by a mighty effort of will, on a Self which is essentially morbid, sensual, and anarchical. Beginning his career as an existential rebel, abnormally preoccupied with crime, blind instinctualism, and decay, Brecht becomes a social revolutionary only after he has investigated all the blind alleys of his early nihilism. The Communist ideology helps him to objectify his feelings and rationalize his art, and it encourages him to attribute an external cause to the cruelty, greed, and lust that he finds in life; but it is never fully adequate to Brecht's metaphysical *Angst*. Brecht may try to convince us that man's aggressive instincts are an outgrowth of the capitalist system, but he never seems wholly convinced himself, especially when his own aggressive instincts are so difficult to control. Even at his most scientifically objective, Brecht continues to introduce a subjective note; even at his most social and political, he remains an essentially moral and religious poet. And though he supports a political orthodoxy which promises social order and benevolence through revolutionary change, he never quite suppresses his sense of the fixed malevolence of nature as reflected in the voracious appetites of man. Brecht's revolt, therefore, is double-layered. On the surface, it is directed against the hypocrisy, avarice, and injustice of bourgeois society; in the depths, against the disorder of the universe and the chaos in the human soul. Brecht's social revolt is objective, active, remedial, realistic; his existential revolt is subjective, passive, irremediable, and romantic. The conflict between these two modes of rebellion is the dialectic of Brecht's plays; and the conflict is not fully resolved until the very end of his career.

The existential aspect of Brecht's revolt, while present in most of his writings, can be most clearly detected in his early work—the poems and plays which precede *The Threepenny Opera*. Here Brecht reveals affinities with two other German dramatists, separated in time but not in temperament, George Büchner and Frank Wedekind. Together with the plays of these two dramatists, Brecht's early

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plays comprise what we might call a German Neo-Romantic movement—a tradition defined by its opposition to the lofty moral postures and Messianic stances of the early German Romantics. Negative and ironic, scrupulously anti-heroic, anti-individualist, and anti-idealist, Brecht developed out of this tradition a determinedly low opinion of human nature, fastening on the criminal or abnormal side of life, and charting these subterranean avenues in searing, distended images. And it is out of this tradition that Brecht investigates the underside of life, exploiting—like his two mentors—the popular entertainments, culture, and expressions of the lower classes: proverbs, vernacular poetry, idiomatic speech, the variety theatre, the circus, the cabaret, and the streetsinger's ballad, the *Moritat*.

Despite the studied indifference with which Brecht affects to examine life in this period, however, he cannot disguise his sense of horror at it. To adapt Joyce's phrase about Stephen Dedalus' Jesuit conditioning, he has the cursed Calvinist strain in him, injected the wrong way. Like Büchner, whose disgust and hatred are clear enough, Brecht exposes, through his exaggerated view of human nature, a strain of disappointed Romanticism. For the Neo-Romantic, apparently agonized by the failure of Romantic ideals of unlimited human freedom, is inclined to see man as wholly determined by external and internal forces, his aspiration mocked by animal instincts and physical decay. Images of rot, stench, and decomposition pervade this drama; characters deteriorate under a peeling shell of flesh. Under the spell of this Augustinian vision. Büchner perceives the "horrible fatalism of all history," a horror which Brecht introduces into all his early drama, where man is merely an excremental object of no value, a "creature eating on a latrine."

The typical development of the Neo-Romantic drama, then, follows the progress of human deterioration—the gradual stripping away of morals, ideals, individualization, and civilized veneer until the human being is revealed in all his naked cruelty or insignificance —accompanied by sex nausea, hatred of the flesh, and ill-disguised sado-masochistic feelings. The masterpiece of the genre is Büchner's *Wozzeck*—at once the most typical and the most original of Neo-Romantic plays—and one which exercised a powerful influence on all of Brecht's early writings.

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To Büchner, society is merely another form of nature; and in the state of nature, man is simply another one of the beasts. Much the same inflamed vision of man in nature burns through Wedekind's *Erdgeist* where—this time with the author's energetic approval—domestic animals are transformed into wild beasts, degenerating under the influence of Lulu, an amoral spirit of the earth; it permeates the film, *The Blue Angel*, where a highly respectable teacher is totally dehumanized through a sordid relationship with a cabaret singer; and it accounts for the lurid horrors and ghastly rot in so much expressionist painting.

German Neo-Romanticism culminates in the early work of Brecht, where it takes the form of extreme antipathy to the social and natural world. As Herbert Ihering observed of Brecht when the poet was only twenty-four, "Brecht is impregnated with the horror of this age in his nerves, in his blood. . . . Brecht physically feels the chaos and putrid decay of the times." Much of this physical revulsion pervades Brecht's early poems, collected in his volume *Hauspostille* (*The Domestic Breviary*, 1927), where he deals obsessively with such Neo-Romantic themes as the meaninglessness of individualism, the inescapable isolation of the natural man, and the vileness of the natural functions, besides displaying a typically Germanic interest in decay and death. And in his moving autobiographical poem, "Concerning Poor B.B.," Brecht openly reveals his conviction that human beings (and he includes himself) are "strangely stinking animals," while proceeding to describe the beauties of nature in these elegiac images: "Towards morning the fir trees piss in the gray light/And their vermin, the birds, begin to cheep."

This obsession with man and nature in a state of putrefaction is also central to Brecht's early drama, where he deals with lower forms of humanity, deteriorating in a terrible environment. In *Baal*, for example, Brecht follows the career of a ruthless, bisexual poet, who satisfies his instincts without conscience, and finally dies in swinish degradation, amidst offal and urine, declaring that the world is merely "the excrement of God." In *Drums in the Night*, he dramatizes the anarchy and isolation of the central character, a returning soldier named Kragler, who rejects the heroic demands of the Spartakus revolution in order to follow the safest and most comfortable way: "I am a swine, and the swine go home." Brecht's

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In the Jungle of Cities illustrates the disorder of the universe and the gratuitous cruelty of mankind, also concluding with the passive acceptance of evil. And in *Man is Man*, he demonstrates the insignificance of the individual by showing how the meek, Wozzeck-like water carrier, Galy Gay, is transformed into a "human fighting machine" by three brutal soldiers—meanwhile illustrating the violence of human instinct in the martinet sergeant, Bloody Five, who can discipline his sexual appetite only by castrating himself.

Much of this savagery and cynicism is deliberately designed to shock; and John Willett has ably described how Brecht was eager to outrage the maddening complacence of the Weimar bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, Brecht's mordant attitudes are deeply rooted in his own nature—so deeply, in fact, that he feared this *Bitterkeit* would affect his creative powers. In "Concerning Poor B.B.," he writes: "In the earthquakes to come it is to be hoped/I shan't allow bitterness to quench my cigar's glow." Like Strindberg, whom he so much resembles in this period, Brecht tries to deal with his own desperation by turning it into art: Baal, Kragler, Garga, Shlink, Bloody Five, Galy Gay, almost all his early characters are aspects of himself, projected into semi-autobiographical form. These characters can be roughly divided into two main types: the active and the passive, those who create violence and those who seek to avoid it—but whether victimizers or victims, almost all of Brecht's characters seem repelled by their own instincts, and seek to achieve a state of calm beyond the turmoil of the appetitive life. Brecht, who is remembered as an incorrigible womanizer, almost invariably associates some dire penalty with the indulgence of the appetites; for him, physical satisfaction leads directly to catastrophe—which may explain why Bloody Five in *Man is Man*, and, later, Lauffer in *The Tutor*, resort to such desperate expedients as self-castration in order to control themselves. Not only sex, but passions of any uncontrolled kind seem to be a source of anxiety to Brecht: anger, outrage, panic, revenge, violence, all are vital elements of his work, and all stand condemned. Brecht is probably trying to master these emotions in himself, for his work exposes his desire for absolute submission, a state of being in which he can conquer his unbridled feelings, and, instead of engaging himself with the external world, merge with it. Brecht's favorite symbol for this passionless state is the condition of the child in its

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mother's womb. In "Concerning Poor B.B.," he speaks of how "My mother carried me to town while in her womb I lay," and he refers repeatedly to the pleasant passivity of this kind of pre-natal transportation. What Brecht really desires is the Buddhist Nirvana—but his own physical needs and his rebellious spirit continually press him back into material life. Brecht's unremitting attempts to control his rebellious instincts by surrendering to a discipline outside himself are to issue, later, in his submission to the Communist orthodoxy, and, still later, in his aspiration towards Oriental impassivity, where one becomes a vessel of the universe—acquiescent, will-less, and obedient. But whatever form it finds, Brecht's desire for impersonality and control reflects his need to escape from the pulls of the flesh.

At this point in his career, Brecht openly reveals his existential horror of life and loathing of the instincts. As for personality, how can one believe in that when Copernicus has shown "that Man is not in the middle of the universe"? Though Brecht shares Nietszche's assumption that Copernicus banished the gods from the heavens, he sings not the *Uebermensch* but the *Untermensch*, the man without possibilities. And his concentration on the more insuperable human limitations, the source of his quarrel with existence, leads him to attack not only the God of the Christians but the God of the Romantics as well: "The good god," as he puts it in *Baal*, "who so distinguished himself by joining the urinary passage with the sex organ"—in short, the God of Nature. Choking on the same bone that stuck in the throat of Strindberg, Brecht cannot swallow the fact that man is born *inter faeces et urinas*; and his pronounced excrementalism makes him fiercely antagonistic to all Romantic aspiration. In this stage of his career, and probably throughout it, Brecht cannot convince himself that this "strangely stinking animal" is capable of heroism, morality, freedom, or anything more than the cynical pursuit of his own advantage and survival. In short, he leaves open no avenues of idealism; his is a negative assault of thundering aggressiveness. Yet, for all his scorn of Romanticism in its more positive forms, his own Romantic temperament can still be glimpsed in his subjective poetic attack, in his ferocious bitterness and disillusionment, and, especially, in his unremitting rebellion against the straitened conditions of modern existence.

Brecht's existentialism is best seen in *In the Jungle of Cities,*

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his third play, completed when he was barely twenty-five. Extremely puzzling and sometimes incoherent, this work is often hastily dismissed as an obscure experiment; but for all its difficulty, it is clearly a major achievement of a poet-genius, which batters at the nerves even when it is baffling the mind. Here Brecht is at his most frenzied and diabolical, displaying that "prodigious and rational disordering of all the senses" which Rimbaud held to be the special attainment of the visionary and seer. Rimbaud's influence, in fact, is unmistakable throughout the play. *In the Jungle of Cities* consists of eleven scenes, some extremely brief, essentially disconnected, but held together by a single sustained action. Characters act upon each other with no apparent cause-and-effect motivation, as in a dream. Its atmosphere is that of a feverish hallucination.

The general location of the play is Chicago, during the period from 1912 to 1915. The action moves from the business section to the slums to Chinatown to the shores of Lake Michigan. Yet, all the settings are mythical; Brecht's Chicago, for example, is a seaport, and his seedy Chinese bars and hotels seem to have come out of Anna May Wong movies or Charlie Chan novels.[1] The central image of the play, if we discount the numerous jungle images, is a metaphor from the world of sport: "The inexplicable boxing match between two men." And the eleven scenes of the play represent the ten rounds of the combat, with an extra scene devoted to the victor, after the other combatant has been "knocked out."

The motives of this seemingly gratuitous conflict have been the subject of some speculation, especially by Martin Esslin and Eric Bentley, who have detected homosexual and sado-masochistic elements in the relationship between the two antagonists. These are undoubtedly there. But more important than the psychological aspects of the work are the philosophical ones—the conflict between the central characters is less physical than metaphysical. The theme of *In the Jungle of Cities* is the impossibility of establishing permanent contact between human beings—not only sexual contact, but social, verbal, and spiritual contact, too.

The opening scene, which takes place in a rental library,

1. This technique is typical of Brecht in most of his plays. His sense of place is completely imaginative; he is, in fact, almost as cavalier about geography as Shakespeare, who also put a seaport in an inland country (Bohemia).

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initiates the conflict—between the fifty-one-year-old Malayan merchant, Shlink, and the young librarian, George Garga. Under the pretense of buying a book, Shlink offers money to Garga for his opinion of a mystery story. But though Garga is willing to give his opinions freely—or to sell Shlink the opinions of "Mr. J. V. Jensen and Mr. Arthur Rimbaud"—he absolutely refuses to make his own intelligence an object of barter. Actually, Shlink's offer has been carefully calculated to lead to combat. Garga is penniless, and his family is starving; but he has somehow preserved his Romantic insistence on personal freedom. Like Brecht, who moved from "the black forests" to "the concrete cities," Garga has come to Chicago from the spacious prairies; his love of freedom is intimately associated with his natural origins. To sell an opinion is to become a bought thing; and thus, as Shlink continually raises his offer, Garga becomes increasingly incensed and humiliated.

Since Brecht already assumes the total determination of modern city life by economic necessity, Garga's romantic idealism is his Achilles heel—and Shlink proceeds to goad and prod it. Though he recognizes the vulnerability of the Romantic idealist in the city jungle, Garga stubbornly refuses to be a "prostitute." And Shlink, cheered to have found a real "fighting man," begins the match by "rocking the ring." First, he arranges to have Garga's girlfriend, Jane Larry, turned into a prostitute by another of his henchmen. And then he has Garga fired: "Your economic security! Watch the boxing ring! It's shaking!" Forced into action against his will, Garga begins quoting from Rimbaud, rips off his clothes, and runs into the streets, still begging for his freedom. He is prepared to sacrifice everything to defend his personal independence. And the fight is on.

For in order to recover his freedom, Garga must destroy his opponent—a turn which Shlink, who desires to be destroyed, had shrewdly foreseen. "When I heard of your habits," he tells Garga, "I thought: a good fighter"—for Shlink knows that Garga is a man *without limits*, a Romantic who will go all the way to keep his self inviolate. To aid in his own destruction, and to equalize the odds, Shlink becomes Garga's thrall: "From today on, Mr. Garga, I place my fate in your hands. . . . From today on, I am your creature. . . . My feelings will be dedicated to you alone, and you will be evil."

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Garga plays on this advantage to plot Shlink's downfall, first haphazardly, then more cunningly.

Schlink's desire for pain, and ultimately for annihilation, are the result of a "disease" which he contracted during his youth on the Yangtze junks, where the rule of life was torture, and man's skin grew so thick that only the most violent probes could pierce it. Garga has been hired to be his executioner, "to stuff a bit of disgust or decay in my mouth so I'd have the taste of death on my tongue." For only through torture, disgust, and death will Shlink be able to feel.

The tenth scene (the last round of the match) takes place in an abandoned railroad tent where Garga, like Judas, spends three last weeks with his sacrificial victim.[2] Here Shlink expresses his love for Garga, and filled with the darkest despair, explains the symptoms of his "disease," the dreadful loneliness he had suffered for forty years. Now at the end, he has fallen victim to "the black mania of this planet—the mania for contact," to be reached "through enmity," the Romantic form of love. But even this final will-to-life has failed:

> The endless isolation of man makes even enmity an unattainable goal. Even with the animals it is impossible to come to an understanding. . . . I have watched animals. Love—warmth from bodily proximity—is our only grace in the darkness. But the union of the organs is the only union and it can never bridge the gap of speech. Still, they come together to beget new beings who can stand at their side in their inconsolable isolation. And the generations look coldly into each other's eyes. . . . The jungle! That's where mankind comes from. Hairy, with the teeth of an ape, good beasts who knew how to live, everything was so easy, they simply tore each other to bits.

In the jungle of cities, man's hide has accumulated so many layers of defensive skin that even the contact between clawing, ferocious beasts is no longer achievable: "Yes, so terrible is the isolation that there isn't even a fight."

Garga, however, averts his face from this nihilistic abyss. Having lost interest in Shlink's "metaphysical action," he has determined to escape with his "naked life." For him, survival has become the *summum bonum*—"a naked life is better than any other life."

2. Another example of Brecht's constant use of religious imagery. In *The Threepenny Opera,* Macheath also is betrayed by the kiss of a Judas (Ginny Jenny) on a Thursday.

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The course of the combat has taught him that the end of such struggles is always the same: "It is not important to be the stronger one, but to be the living one." Idealism, heroism, individualism, freedom, significant combat—all are "words, on a planet which is not even in the middle." And leaving the ring, he carries his "raw flesh into the icy rains," as Shlink—kayoed—falls to the floor. For Shlink, it only remains to finish himself; and he commits hari-kari, the howl of the lynch mob in his ears, after a burst of surrealist prose. As for Garga, he survives. In the last scene, he has sold Shlink's business—along with his own father and sister—and with the proceeds, is preparing to enter the jungle of New York. He has repudiated his combative need for personal opinions; his passion is spent; he will fight no more.

The philosophical conclusions of this work are much too bleak to sustain an artist for long—there is nothing in the suicidal nihilism of Shlink to inspire the process of creation—and so it is not surprising that, a few years later, in 1927 or 1928, Brecht begins to take instruction at the Marxist Worker's College in Berlin. Brecht's decision is clearly foreshadowed in the development of Garga. For like his semi-autobiographical hero, Brecht has repudiated the quest for identity and the need for personal opinions; like Garga, he is pursuing, though somewhat less cynically, the path of his own survival. If subjective individualism leads to chaos, then the subjective consciousness must be expunged; if personal rebellion leads to madness, then one must learn to conform. For him, the way out of existential despair lies along the ideological path of Communism: "Not madness," as Brecht characterizes it in *Die Mutter*, "but the end of madness . . . not chaos but order." *In The Jungle of Cities* powerfully suggests the madness Brecht perceives in Nature and the chaos he senses in the universe; and it is certainly true, as Martin Esslin observes, that Communism "dissolved the nightmare of absurdity" for the dramatist, and "dispelled the oppressive feeling that life was ruled by vast and impersonal forces." On the other hand, the play also suggests that the anarchy he describes is projected from inside, and the aggressions of his central characters are a crucial element of his own nature. His attraction to Communism, therefore, can also be ascribed to the fact that it offers a system of regimentation, a form of rational control over his frightening in-

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dividualism and terrifying subjectivity. Brecht's desire for passivity, in short, stems from his fear of activity. And his rage for order is really an extension of his desire to drift with the tide, for Communism represents a tide with a meaningful direction. As Lion Feuchtwanger has observed in a fictionalized biography of the author, Brecht "really suffered from his personality. He wanted to escape from it, he wanted to be only one atom among many," later adding the interesting reflection that he was "singularly deficient in social instincts." For such a one, Communism could be the ideal creed, because it couples anti-social rebellion with the promise of true community—and more important, because it encourages the escape from personality, offering the most impersonal and selfless discipline since primitive Christianity.

I am suggesting that Brecht responded as eagerly to the Communist discipline as to the Communist dogma; there is something almost religious about his attachment to his new creed. Like most new converts, his fanaticism begins to exceed that of the orthodox; using "science" and "reason" as ritualistic passwords, he turns to ideology as if it were theology, and enters politics as if he were joining a monastic order. Brecht's monkishness is expressed not only in the new simplicity of his poetry, which grows more functional and clipped, but in almost every aspect of his behavior. He begins to wear a simple worker's uniform as if it were a monk's habit; he crops his hair short; his surroundings become more stark and austere; and his private life more ascetic. Most important, he begins to urge the complete extinction of the personality, accompanied by total obedience to a higher order.

As Esslin has noted, the word *Einverständnis* (acquiescence or consent) begins to run like a *leit-motif* through his work, especially through those five *Lehrstücke* he writes in quick succession from 1928 to 1930. A few of these plays, in fact, are wholly concerned with teaching acquiescence to a rebellious individual, climaxing at the moment when the central figure renounces his personal feelings, denounces his insubordination, and accepts the death sentence imposed by his judges. In *The Measures Taken*, for example, a sympathetic Young Comrade, having permitted his hatred of injustice to jeopardize the mission of his fellow agitators, is taught the dangers of individual rebellion and instinctual reactions, and consents to his own liquidation. It has been observed that the rigid

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orthodoxy of such a play is probably more of an embarrassment than a service to the Communist cause; and under pressure from the Party, Brecht withdrew *The Measures Taken* from performance, commenting that nobody could learn anything from it except the actor who plays the Young Comrade. On the other hand, one begins to suspect that Brecht wrote such works less for the enlightenment of other ideologues than as a self-disciplinary measure. The Young Comrade is probably himself; the subjective, instinctual, and individual qualities he is trying to punish are his own. Even in the act of celebrating impersonality and obedience Brecht is likely to betray his personal conflicts, inadvertently remaining the hero of his own work. In their harsh, incantatory quality, Brecht's agit-prop plays seem like the *Aves* of a novitiate, paying penance for a recurrent sin. But his subjective anarchy is never quite subdued, and his probationary period never really comes to an end.

Brecht's Communism, then, is less a substitute for his early Neo-Romanticism than a layer superimposed on top of it—his rational ideology emerges as the dialectical counterpart of his irrationalism and despair. Brecht's new commitment permits him to function as an artist, but his political solutions are fashioned for essentially metaphysical problems. To be sure, Brecht's assumptions are now more hopeful and optimistic. Where he once identified evil with fate and assumed it to be fixed, he now identifies it with bourgeois society and assumes it to be changeable. "According to the ancients," he writes in his notes to an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (1948), "man is powerless before the workings of fate. In the adaptation of Bertolt Brecht, man's fate is in the hands of man himself." His despairing belief in Darwinist science (behaviorism and determinism) has been replaced by an affirmative belief in Marxist science (class war and revolution)—his despondent feelings about the future of the individual have given way to more cheerful feelings about the future of the collective. Whatever his expectations of the future, however, Brecht continues to focus on the bleaker aspects of present-day reality. While he refuses to reach tragic conclusions, he is still primarily occupied with tragic conditions. Human deterioration may now be attributed to the social system, but rot still catches his eye, even if it is now called by the name of Capitalism. As for the natural environment, Brecht now believes

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that "science is able to change nature to an extent that makes the world appear almost habitable" (the "almost" is good); but he still finds man victimized by the external world—still lost in the emptiness of the Copernican universe.

Brecht's characters, however, are also victimized now by a cruel society. As we might expect, his Marxist orientation puts social-economic concerns at the center of his art. The rebel against the chaos of nature has turned a rebel against the social system. And while his existential revolt found its literary roots in a German Neo-Romantic tradition, his social revolt is influenced by a more international group of writers—I refer not only to the Communist dialecticians but also to pre- and post-Marxist dramatists in a Jonsonian tradition: Ben Jonson, William Wycherly, John Gay, Henri Becque, Hendrik Ibsen, and (to a lesser degree) Bernard Shaw.

Even here, however, we can see that Brecht has not so much changed his old assumptions as assimilated them within a new intellectual structure. For between the Neo-Romantic dramatist and the Jonsonian satirist there is one important point of agreement—that Man (to use a Renaissance adage) is a Wolf to Man. If nature is a jungle to Büchner, Wedekind, and the early Brecht, then to Jonson, Becque, and the later Brecht, it is society which harbors the wild beasts—the buzzard, the crow, the raven, the fly, and the fox, all picking each other's bones in an orgy of greed and acquisitiveness. These authors generally resemble Marx in their *negative* critique of society. For if they are silent about the perfectability of man, the class struggle, and the classless society, they all visualize a world dominated by economic determinism, where the true God of man is Plutus, the God of Gold.

Brecht, himself, seems to be more responsive to the critical than to the Utopian side of Marx—at least, in his plays. Interpreting life as dominated by the search for food and the lust for money (he wanted money and food to replace sex and power as the central subjects of the drama), he also conceives of man as an aggressive beast of prey who grows fat by battening on the flesh of his victims. "What keeps a man alive," asks Peachum, in a song from *The Threepenny Opera*, "he lives on others—by grinding, sweating, defeating, beating, cheating, eating some other man." And in *The Rise*

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and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, the hero, Jimmy Mahoney, is forced to learn that the only capital crime is the lack of money. Brecht's inexhaustible gallery of thieves, swindlers, soldiers, whores, brothel madams, gangsters, landowners, Nazis, and businessmen form the population of a human bestiary, concealing behind their charming smiles the razor teeth of the shark.

On the other hand, Brecht's Communist orientation does make him ambivalent about which human faculty creates evil—for here the views of his double inheritance are in conflict. The characters of Neo-Romantic drama—Büchner's Wozzeck, Wedekind's Lulu, Strindberg's Laura—are usually driven by the unconscious, while those of satiric drama—Jonson's Volpone, Gay's Macheath, Becque's M. Tessier—generally follow the path of their rational self-interest, impervious to all drives besides greed and lust. Brecht's early characters, as we have seen, are clearly at the mercy of anarchical impulses, but his later characters seem to alternate between emotional chaos and rational control, intermittently dominated by and dominating the instinctual pulls of their natures. Many critics, and most notably Esslin, have commented on the omnipresent Brechtian conflict between reason and instinct as personified in split characters. But, in a sense, all of Brecht's later characters are split, vacillating between reason and instinct as dizzily as classical heroes vacillate between love and duty. These conflicts suggest some of the contradictions inherent in Brecht's double revolt. As a Marxist, Brecht is convinced that society is based on rational self-interest, and believes that a more unselfish use of reason will bring about a more perfect man and a more benevolent world. As an existential rebel, however, he is more dubious about the power of human reason; and his own vestigial anarchism forces him to deal with the wildness of the instincts and the irrationality of life—in short, with *im*perfectability.

Consider his ambivalent treatment of his central conflict. On the social-objective level of his plays, Brecht is drawing a clear-cut moral: Man's instincts are healthy, compassionate, kindly, and courteous, but in a competitive society, he must suppress these natural feelings, exercising selfish reason in order to survive. The emotional Anna of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, for example, can build her *kleine haus' im Louisiana* only by squelching her impulsive decency and charity (identified with Christian "sins"), and following the prac-

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tical advice of her rational sister. Since unselfishness comes naturally and instinctually, selfishness is an extremely difficult discipline. "Terrible is the temptation to goodness," notes The Storyteller in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, while Brecht, in a poem, observing the swollen veins of a Japanese demon, reflects: "What a strain it is to be evil." Nevertheless, the nature of the system demands that man suppress his brotherly feelings, and realistically look after himself. "For when feet are bare and bellies empty," goes a verse in "The Invigorating Effect of Money," "Love of virtue always turns to greed." Or as Peachum puts it: "We would be good, not coarse and crude/It's just that circumstance won't have it so." Man is good, the system bad; ergo, conform to the system, or change the world.

This is the Marxist Brecht speaking—but the Calvinist Brecht is much less sanguine about the healthiness of human instinct. For though Brecht may insist that man must eat before he can become a moral being, he cannot always disguise the fact that the process of ingestion fills him with a little disgust. *Das Fressen*, one of the most important activities in Brechtian drama, invariably seems singularly unappealing on the stage. Galileo's wolfish appetite, as Brecht tells us in *The Little Organon*, is the key to his moral flabbiness; and Jacob Schmidt of *Mahagonny*, so gluttonous that he wants to devour himself, destroys himself by stuffing his stomach with three whole calves. Not only *das Fressen* is accompanied by a hint of nausea, but *die Liebe* as well—more often than not, Brecht's lovers are merely lechers and whores. Objectively, Brecht may associate instinct with virtue; subjectively, he identifies it with appetites—and appetites, generally, of a debased kind. A fetid, hot-house sensuality runs through most of Brecht's work. And instead of positive Marxist heroes, amoral, appetitive types like Baal continue to dominate his plays, still seen through the hideous focus of the excremental vision. In short, Brecht still seems unconsciously convinced that man is a creature eating on a latrine. And just as often as instinct issues in economic bankruptcy, it issues in spiritual bankruptcy—decay and death. In *Mahagonny*, for example, Jimmy Mahoney opens the city to total license after a typhoon. His motto (like that of Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème) becomes *Du Darfst* (Do What Thou Wilt). And after abandoning himself to the greedy consumption of food, sex, sport, and whiskey, Mahoney discovers that his appetites have led

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to ruin. Politically, Brecht can condemn unbridled instinct as an anti-social trait; psychologically, it probably represents his own unredeemable flaw, the main constituent of his continuingly anarchical nature.

Brecht's ambivalence accounts for the dialectical power and texture of his work. Through the clash of opposites, his *Widersprüchsgeist* (contradictory spirit), as he liked to call it, is able to find its complicated expression. Unable to resolve his contradictions, Brecht fails to create unambiguous political ideology, a lapse for which he is curiously chided by Herbert Luethy ("Never has Brecht been able to indicate by even the simplest poetic image or symbol what the world for which he is agitating should really look like"). Yet, his failure to be a Utopian ideologist is his triumph as a dramatic poet; like all the great rebel dramatists, he draws his power from the clash of thesis and antithesis, always skirting a fake harmonious synthesis. Whether Brecht is examining the conflict of reason and instinct, vice and virtue, cowardice and heroism, adaptation and revolt, science and religion, Marxism and Neo-Romanticism, he almost invariably concentrates on the opposition rather than the resolution of his terms; and he even suggests that life is good because it is unresolved:

Humanity! Two souls abide
Within thy breast!
Do not set either one aside:
To live with both is best!
Be torn apart with constant care!
Be two in one! Be here, be there!
Hold the low one, hold the high one—
Hold the straight one, hold the sly one—
Hold the pair!

Even here, the content of the statement is being dissolved by its tone—the passage is a burlesque of Goethe's *Faust*. Brecht seems constitutionally incapable of creating a positive idea without somehow undermining it. Making parody a crucial element of his art, he finds his function in ridiculing the positive ideas of others—and himself; playing on incongruities, he invariably hedges his own commitment with a mocking, derisory, deflating irony.

Now irony, of course, is the literary device not of the political ideologue but of the free artist. And Brecht's derisive tone may ex-

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plain why he has never been wholly accepted in Communist countries—and for that matter, in the democracies either. He is very rarely able to make those warm affirmations so beloved by the manipulators of culture on both sides of the iron curtain. Just as he mocks the sentimentality, humanitarianism, and idealism of the liberal West, so is he curiously reluctant to celebrate the "brighter side" of Communism, to create a "positive hero," or even to follow his own declared intention to depict man "as he might become." Brecht is more comfortable as a sceptic. "Scepticism moves mountains," he declares, and "Of all things certain the most certain is doubt." For Brecht, wariness and mistrust are scientific attitudes, essential to an impartial examination of the world. But they are also the qualities of a Socratic temperament, suspicious from the very beginning:

> *I gather some fellows around me towards evening:*
> *We address each other as "gentlemen."*
> *They put their feet up on my table*
> *And say: things will improve. And I don't ask when.*
> ("Concerning Poor B.B.")

How Brecht manages to maintain his scepticism, detachment, and irony while declaring his unquestioning allegiance to the Communist cause is one of the most skillful accomplishments of dramatic literature. But it is the achievement of a man who is split in half.

Few plays demonstrate so well how the split is transformed into the delicate equilibrium of art as *The Threepenny Opera*, that inspired collaboration between Brecht and the composer Kurt Weill. Along with Brecht's theory of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, this work is too well known to need discussion here; but one may note how at the end, with Macheath's sudden pardon by the Queen, the whole play, including its apparent ideological tendency, is inverted, the world is suddenly seen from the underside, and even Brecht's positive affirmations seem to come out backward. And one finally comes away from *The Threepenny Opera* unbalanced by contrasts, dislocated by contradictions, foundering in the shifting perspective—secure only in the author's unrelenting revolt as transmitted through his negative, ironic tone.

Much the same doubleness of vision and unity of tone can be found in *Mother Courage*, Brecht's masterpiece and, without doubt, one of the finest works of the modern theatre. Completed in 1939,

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when World War II is just beginning and Brecht is in exile in Scandinavia, *Mother Courage* ostensibly deals with the Thirty Years War, that seventeenth-century feast of death, fire, and pestilence. But its real subject is all wars, as seen from the perspective of one who loathes military heroism. This play, according to Bentley, can be partly construed as a reply to Schiller's *Wallenstein*, but it is also a reply to all works which glorify heroism or eulogize national ideals. Brecht has finally made the passive side of his nature the source of a positive position: that of a belligerent pacifism. He observes the exploits of war, like those of peace, from the underside, examining what Edmund Wilson has called "the self-assertive sounds" which man "utters when he is fighting and swallowing others." To achieve his satire on the morality of the military life, Brecht concentrates not on the battles but on the commonplace activities of day-to-day living, as performed by the war's orphans, truants, and subordinates. In the background of *Mother Courage* pass the victories, defeats, reversals, sieges, assaults, retreats, and advances which form the substance of history. In the foreground, the private lives of the non-combatants provide a non-heroic contrast. The external course of the conflict is narrated, like newspaper headlines, in the legends preceding each scene, but it interests Brecht only insofar as it influences local commerce: "General Tilley's victory at Leipzig," the title informs us, "costs Mother Courage four shirts."

For the real struggle is over money, food, and clothing. Brecht, still examining the relationship between capitalism and crime, is now applying his Marxist perceptions to the crimes of history itself. If the businessman is identified with the gangster in *The Threepenny Opera,* then he is identified with the warmaker in *Mother Courage*. Property is not only theft, but murder, rape, and pillage; war may be the extension of diplomacy but it is also an extension of free enterprise. Locked in endless combat, the Protestant Swedes and the Catholic Germans are told they are fighting for religious ideals, but like the Swedish King Gustavus, whose zeal was so great that he not only liberated Poland from the Germans but offered to liberate Germany as well, the crusading warlords usually make "quite a profit on the deal." Religious piety, jingo patriotism, bourgeois respectability, all are merely synonyms for greed, acquisition, and self-advancement.

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And since war is "just the same as trading," the morality which justifies it must be considered an evil sanction.

Seen from this perspective, heroism looks like a ghastly skeleton, rattling its bones in the wind; and in *Mother Courage*, heroic actions invariably stem either from stupidity, insanity, brutality, or simple human error. The spokesman for Brecht's anti-heroic point of view is Anna Fierling, the canteen woman known more familiarly as Mother Courage. Like so many of Brecht's rascally characters, this salty, cunning, self-serving woman has much in common with Falstaff; and like Falstaff, she functions as a satirical commentator and comic deflator. To her, the only quality worthy of respect is cowardice; and she commands respect herself because of her consistency—she invariably chooses the most selfish, ignominious, and profitable course. Even her nickname is ironic: her "courageous" breach of the lines during the bombardment at Riga was made to keep some loaves from going moldy. As the supreme advocate of adaptation and acquiescence, Courage is extremely cynical about the motives of others. She attributes the death of General Tilley, for example, to the fact that he got lost in a fog and strayed to the front by mistake. She is probably right. Brecht, in other words, gives us a Falstaff without a Hal or Hotspur. Courage's unhesitating assumption about the baseness of human motives belongs to the author; and it is not modified by any contrasting ideal.

Yet, Brecht's all-embracing cynicism implies an ideal, for he is rebelling against a reality he despises. "The Song of the Great Capitulation"—possibly the most moving lyric in the entire Brechtian canon—reveals the history behind Brecht's cynical attitudes. For here Mother Courage, trying to discourage an indignant soldier from endangering his safety, sings of the degeneration of her own rage against injustice. Beginning as a romantic individualist—"All or nothing. Anyway never take second best. I am the master of my fate. I'll take no orders from no one"—she eventually becomes the cautious compromiser, marching in time with the band: "You must get in with people. If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Don't stick your neck out!" It is the story of how George Garga is eventually forced to repudiate his belief in freedom. And it may very well be the story of how Brecht abandons his early Romantic

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idealism under the pressure of internal passions and external constraints:

> *Our plans are big, our hopes colossal.*
> *We hitch our wagon to a star.*
> *(Where there's a will, there's a way. You can't*
> *hold a good man down.)*
> *"We can lift mountains," says the apostle.*
> *And yet: how heavy one cigar!*

Lifting that cigar has become the whole ambition of Brecht's heroine: her sole purpose is to keep herself and her family safe and alive. In the fulfillment of this difficult and ultimately fruitless task, she employs ruthlessness, charm, bribery, guile, and simple horse sense, always true to her coward's creed that discretion is the better part of valor.

Mother Courage's bitter hostility to heroism has made her, paradoxically, a heroic figure to audiences—an image of the "little people," beleaguered by forces beyond their control, yet resiliently continuing to make their way. There is no question that Mother Courage—like Falstaff, who was meant to be a Vice figure (Sloth and Vanity) but who somehow transcended his morality play role—got away from the author. And like the rejection of Falstaff, the pathos of Courage does begin to take on larger dimensions. Nevertheless, one must also realize that Brecht *does* realize his conscious intentions with the character, and that the tragedy he unintentionally created co-exists with the morality play he designed. The responses evoked by Brecht's heroine are a good deal more complicated than those evoked, say, by the pathetic Nora Clitheroe, the heroine of another anti-war play, O'Casey's *Plough and the Stars*; Courage is not just a passive sufferer, playing on the sentiment of the audience, but also an active source of suffering. She may be a victim of the war, but she is also an instrument of the war, and the embodiment of its evils. Brecht's revolt, in short, remains double. Like Macheath, Mother Courage is both the agent of the author's rebellion and the thing rebelled against. Her determination to play it safe makes her the enemy of hypocrisy, but it also makes her cold and grasping. And though her singleminded devotion to survival is sympathetic in relation to her three children, it becomes mere aggrandizement in relation to her fourth child—the wagon. Thus,

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Mother Courage is no Niobe, all tears, but the author of her own destruction. One of those lower-class capitalists whom Brecht was always creating, she is, as the Chaplain tells her, a "hyena of the battlefield," and those who live by the war must die by it.

Mother Courage haggles while her children die—this is the spine of the play. For while Courage is pursuing commercial advantage, her family is sacrificed, one by one, to the war. Eric Bentley has already commented on the tripartite structure of the work where, at the end of three discrete sections, another child is laid on the war's altar. The offspring of three different fathers, Finnish Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and German Kattrin are an international brigade of victims. But it is not a supernatural agent which strikes the children down; it is the cruel hand of man, abetted by their own self-destroying instincts. In "The Song of the Wise and the Good," Caesar's bravery is identified with Eilif's heroism, Socrates' honesty with Swiss Cheese's incorruptibility, St. Martin's unselfishness with Kattrin's kindness, and Solomon's wisdom with Courage's shrewdness. The dominant qualities of both the great and the common lay them low; virtue doesn't pay: "God's Ten Commandments" have not "done us any good."

Brecht, however, cannot refrain from giving an ironic twist to his already ironic statement—for the "virtues" he describes are all, with the exception of Kattrin's kindness, highly dubious qualities. Eilif's bravery, for example, is, at best, impulsive foolishness. While the Sergeant is cunningly distracting Courage's attention by bargaining with her over a belt, Eilif is off with the Recruiting Officer, pressed into war by his lust for glory. Eilif's song, "The Fishwife and the Soldier," predicts the outcome of such rashness, for it tells how a headstrong son is killed by his own bravery, despite all his mother's cautious warnings. Impulsiveness leads to death: "The lad is swept out by the tide:/He floats with the ice to the sea." Eilif soon drifts with the tide of death because he ignored his mother's advice to drift with the tide of life. Having "played the hero in God's own war" by slaughtering a number of innocent peasants who wished only to protect their cattle (here bravery turns into sadistic brutality), Eilif repeats this heroic exploit during an interlude of peace—and is led off to be shot. Like Chaplin's Verdoux, he discovers that virtues in wartime are considered crimes in peacetime, and that law and morality shift their ground to accommodate a nation's needs.

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Swiss Cheese, the "honest child," is another victim of a dubious virtue. As paymaster of a Protestant regiment, he is entrusted with the cashbox; and when he is captured by the Catholics, he refuses to surrender it up. This kind of honesty, as Courage observes, is sheer stupidity: Swiss Cheese is too simpleminded to provide for his own safety. Here, however, Courage is in a position to save her child through the exercise of her Solomon-like wisdom: "They're not wolves," she observes of his Catholic captors, "they're human and after money. God is merciful and men are bribable." Her analysis of motive is perfectly accurate, but it is precisely because of her excessive shrewdness that the device does not work. Forced to pawn her wagon to obtain sufficient bribe money, Courage is anxious to reserve enough for her own security. But the Catholics are in a hurry, and her prolonged bargaining is climaxed by the terrible realization, "I believe—I haggled too long." Swiss Cheese, the significance of his name finally clear, is carried in on a stretcher riddled by eleven bullets—to be thrown on a garbage heap because his mother is afraid to claim the body.

Kattrin is Courage's only truly virtuous child, the soul of kindness and the most positive figure in the play. It is a characteristic of Brecht's attitude towards positive values that she is a mute; but through her expressive gestures and responses, the cruelty and horror of the war are most eloquently told. Even her dumbness is related to these terrors—"a soldier stuck something in her mouth when she was little." Because of her muteness, her serenity, and her love of children, Kattrin sometimes achieves allegorical stature—she is much like Aristophanes' Peace, blinded, gagged, raped, and buried by war. But Brecht's war is endless; and, unlike Aristophanes' mute figure, Kattrin is led to enjoy no hymeneal banquet at the end. Instead of being pulled out of the pit, she is hurled into one: the war buries Kattrin for all time. Courtesans like the camp follower, Yvette, may thrive on conflict, for Yvette accepts the whore's barrenness, so much like that of the war. But Kattrin is *Kindernkarr*, children-crazy, and it is her consuming love for these fruits of Peace that finally destroys her.

Once again, the death occurs because the mother is haggling. Having successfully resisted the temptation to leave Kattrin behind and find a secure berth with her lover, the Cook, Courage is, never-

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theless, still looking after her profits: she has left Kattrin with the wagon while she buys stocks cheap from the frightened townspeople. While she is gone, the Catholics capture a farmhouse, preparing for an ambush of the town. The farmers, afraid for their family in the town, appeal to God to save their four grandchildren. But, to their horror, their prayers for once are answered. Moved by the mention of children in danger, Kattrin has climbed to the roof of the farmhouse, where she begins to beat her drum. At last, Peace has found a tongue, rhythmically commenting on its ancient invincible enemy. To smother the sounds of this alarum, the soldiers and peasants try to create their own noises—peaceful ones, they begin to chop wood. Yet, Kattrin's drumming mounts in intensity, and in desperation. When a lieutenant offers to spare her mother if she descends from the roof, Kattrin drums more heatedly; when he backs his promise with his word of honor, she drums most furiously of all. The smashing of the wagon, the knifing of a sympathetic peasant, the threat to her own life—nothing stops this desperate tattoo. She is finally shot off the roof by a hail of musketry; but the town is saved.

The episode is simple, startling, magnificent, with a mounting emotional crescendo created primarily through the use of drumbeats. But the catharsis it accomplishes, so rare in Brecht's drama, is followed, almost immediately, by grim, cooling irony. Kattrin's sacrifice has really been in vain. The town is saved, but the sound which signifies this is the explosion of a cannon. The war will continue for another twelve years; and after this war is finished, three hundred more years of killing will follow.

Brought on stage for the *threnos*, Courage witnesses the utter desolation of her hopes. The fault, again, has partially been hers ("If you hadn't gone off to get your cut," says an old peasant, "maybe it wouldn't have happened"), but she is too dazed now to know it. Thinking that Kattrin is only asleep, she sings her a lullaby; even the lullaby concerns the need for clothing and food. Her sustaining illusion is that Eilif may still be alive. Without this illusion, only nothingness confronts her—the inconsolable blankness of life, induced by a malignant universe, inhuman men, and her own flawed nature. We are out of the world of Falstaffian comedy and into the desolate world of *King Lear*; but unlike Lear, Brecht's heroine is denied even the release of death. When the armies move by, singing her song

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about the certainty of the seasons and the certainty of man's mortality —the coming of the springtime of life before the winter of death— she cries to them: "Hey, take me with you"—and straps herself to the wagon. She is pulling it alone now, but it is no longer very heavy: supplies and passengers have all been destroyed. Courage and the wagon merge—both bruised and battered by war, both somehow still durable. Courage has dragged it over half of Europe, learning nothing. She will drag it a good deal further before she stops, animated only by that basic life instinct: the need to survive. The smallness and the greatness of this woman are clear at the end, as they are clear throughout this monumental work, where Brecht so angrily takes away from the human race—and gives it back so much.

Mother Courage is the culminating work of Brecht's career, but it is hardly the end of it. During the war and after, in exile and back in East Berlin, Brecht continues to create a profusion of plays— including at least one masterpiece, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. But after *Mother Courage*, Brecht's savage indignation begins to leave him, his rebellion progressively cools. Even as his plays become more openly Communistic in subject matter, his approach grows more sweet and even-tempered. Virtuous, maternal women like Kattrin— Shen Te, Simone Machard, Grusha—move in to the center of the action, while his secondary characters develop deeper dimensions, and more complex motivations than simple greed and lust. Instead of castigating humanity, Brecht is beginning to celebrate it; instead of illustrating his themes through ironic comparisons, he is beginning to employ moral allegories and parables. Brecht's later approach to character and his use of less exaggerated comparisons suggest how he is losing his need to rebel against reality; as further proof, Nature has returned to his work—no longer hostile and ugly, but calm, serene, and even beautiful. Less sardonic, more relaxed, Brecht grows more lyrical and carefree; in fact, if Brecht's first period is Büchnerian, and his second Jonsonian, then his third is clearly Shakespearean —some of his plays have an atmosphere akin to Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Even Brecht's theory is loosening up from the rigid didacticism of his early days. In that latter-day *Poetics, The Little Organon For the Theatre* (1948), Brecht finally permits himself to speak of "entertainment" in the drama, an element he used to scorn

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as hypnotic and culinary; and he even expresses the ideological heresy that "the easiest form of existence is in art."

"A contemplative attitude," notes Ronald Gray, "is thus yoked with the revolutionary one that Brecht still maintained." And this contemplative attitude, we should add, is the final development of Brecht's existential revolt. While Brecht has remained a Marxist, he has finally transcended his Neo-Romantic horror at life. Brecht's contemplative interests are underlined by his increasing interest in Oriental forms, characters, and subject matter—a large proportion of his poems and plays are now inspired by the East. It is true that Brecht is attracted to the Noh play, the Chinese drama, and the Kabuki theatre because of their alienation techniques; and like Yeats, he uses conventions like masks, mime, dance, and gesture in order to restore that naiveté and simplicity that the over-sophisticated Western theatre has lost. Still, Brecht has a very special philosophical affinity with the drama of the Orient, for it is a drama of submission, in which the characters recognize a universal intelligence and try to merge with it, freeing themselves of worldly desire.[3]

As proof, Brecht's interest in the Oriental drama is accompanied, during this last period, by an interest in the Eastern religious thinkers: Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tse, the philosophers of obedience through the annihilation of the physical self. It is probable that, with the advance of age, Brecht had finally subdued his troublesome passions. No longer harried by appetite, he gives himself up to that drifting and merging which he desired all his life. Like Strindberg, in short, Brecht works his way through, after a career of fierce rebellion, to a position of resignation; at last, he achieves that security and serenity he associates with the mother's womb. In a late poem, "Buddha's Parable of the Burning House," Brecht returns to that recurrent water image of passive suspension. Buddha has preached the doctrine of the wheel of desire, and advised "That we shed all craving and

3. Cf. Makoto Ueda, "The Implications of the Noh Drama," *Sewanee Review*, Summer 1961, where the author affirms that the characters of Noh drama "lack the masculine courage and overpowering energy of the heroes of Western tragedies; they do not fight, they submit. . . . Thus the Noh drama is primarily religious—in the sense that it depicts man's coming to recognize an absolute power in the universe and his learning to submit himself to it." This might be a description of Brecht's ambitions throughout his life.

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thus/Undesiring enter the nothingness that he called Nirvana"; and a student, trying to understand the doctrine, has compared Nirvana with floating in water, wondering whether the sensation is pleasing or "*kalt, leer, und bedeutunglos*" (cold, empty, and meaningless). Buddha replies with his famous parable of those who, while their house was burning, wondered what the weather was like outside; and Brecht, at the end of the poem, applies this lesson to those who would resist Communist revolution, wondering whether it was good. Brecht's desire for revolt is still satisfied by his identification with Communism; but his desire for peace is now expressed through images of Oriental calm. Brecht, therefore, comes to terms with life only by continuing to reject it—by drifting with a political tide, he overcomes his spiritual horror and nausea. And this is the only synthesis of Brecht's double revolt. Only by merging with evil did he feel he could still function for good; only by embracing the destroyers could he still join the ranks of the creators. The chicanery and compromises Brecht accepted for the sake of the survival of himself and his art are not always very attractive. And no modern playwright better exemplifies the dwindling possibilities of revolt in an age of totalitarianism, war, and the mass state. But if Brecht sometimes sacrificed his personal integrity to a collective falsehood, then this was in order that his individualism could still be secretly expressed. His drama remains the final measurement of this achievement—acts of bitterness which did not quench his cigar but rather kept it aglow.

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POEMS

THE GERANIUM

When I put her out, once by the garbage pail,
She looked so limp and bedraggled,
So foolish and trusting, like a sick poodle,
Or a wizened aster in late September,
I brought her back in again
For a new routine—
Vitamins, water, and whatever
Sustenance seemed sensible
At the time: she'd lived
So long on gin, bobbie pins, half-smoked cigars, dead beer,
Her shrivelled petals falling
On the faded carpet, the stale
Steak grease stuck to her fuzzy leaves.
(Dried-out, she creaked like a tulip.)

The things she endured!—
The dumb dames shrieking half the night
Or the two of us, alone, both seedy,
Me breathing booze at her,
She leaning out of her pot toward the window.

Near the end, she seemed almost to hear me—
And that was scary—
So when that snuffling cretin of a maid
Threw her, pot and all, into the trash-can,
I said nothing.

But I sacked the presumptuous hag the next week,
I was that lonely.

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OTTO

I

He was the youngest son of a strange brood,
A Prussian who learned early to be rude
To fools and frauds: He does not put on airs
Who lived above a potting shed for years.
I think of him, and I think of his men,
As close to him as any kith or kin.
Max Laurisch had the greenest thumb of all.
A florist does not woo the beautiful:
He potted plants as if he hated them.
What root of his ever denied its stem?
When flowers grew, their bloom extended him.

II

His hand could fit into a woman's glove,
And in a wood he knew whatever moved;
Once when he saw two poachers on his land,
He threw his rifle over with one hand;
Dry bark flew in their faces from his shot,—
He always knew what he was aiming at.
They stood there with their guns; he walked toward,
Without his rifle, and slapped each one hard;
It was no random act, for those two men
Had slaughtered game, and cut young fir trees down.
I was no more than seven at the time.

III

A house for flowers; House upon house they built,
Whether for love or out of obscure guilt
For ancestors who loved a warlike show,
Or Frenchmen killed a hundred years ago,
And yet still violent men, whose stacked-up guns
Killed every cat that neared their pheasant runs;
When Hattie Wright's angora died as well,

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My father took it to her, by the tail.
Who loves the small can be both saint and boor,
(And some grow out of shape, their seed impure;)
The Indians loved him, and the Polish poor.

IV

In my mind's eye I see those fields of glass,
As I looked out at them from the high house,
Riding beneath the moon, hid from the moon,
Then slowly breaking whiter in the dawn;
When George the watchman's lantern dropped from sight
The long pipes knocked: it was the end of night.
I'd stand upon my bed, a sleepless child
Watching the waking of my father's world.—
O world so far away! O my lost world!

Theodore Roethke

THE CLOSING OF THE WAVES

How is it that in this new sun
The old Elixir Hotels are still standing
In attitudes of eternity
Their windowpanes munching the apricot light

Last meal before the closing of the waves
The ruins are telling lies
Every tumor attracts the green fly
Its emerald corset its appetite baser than anyone's

All water-dreamers with corrupted flesh
Attract the crayfish which keeps on seeking
Upstream into the past
Its vigor to come

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And the hospital window veils his cancer
Better than the wife's eye
Her irremediable solitude

Ruin is our natural station
Ruin under the nails ruin in the teeth

LACKAWANNA MANNAHATTA

Lackawanna Mannahatta
City submerged under the sea of stars
Beaked gnomes of motors asleep in beds of mint

The morning twilight has discovered
The truth slain in a thicket of hawthorne
The red wick of his hair
One day will lead the revolt

Through the city's cables a soiled blood flows
Our temples' bricks are made from the menstruations
Of an army of one-breasted amazons

Vice takes vegetable forms
Caterpillars in tawny fur
Degrade the rustic Paestum

In a Lackawanna suburb
I will come back on fishmarket day
Some skinny Friday
When the women feel the tide coming in under their triple skirts

Ivan Goll
(*Translated by Galway Kinnell*)

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BIRDWATCHERS OF AMERICA

"I suffer now continually from vertigo, and today, 23 of Jan., 1862, I received a singular warning: I felt the wind of the wing of madness pass over me."
Baudelaire, Journals

It's all very well to dream of a dove that saves,
Picasso's or the Pope's;
The one that annually coos in Our Lady's ear
Half the world's hopes,
And the other one that shall cunningly engineer
The retirement of all businessmen to their graves
And when this is brought about
Make us the loving brothers of every lout—

But in our part of the country a false dusk
Lingers for hours; it steams
From the soaked hay, wades in the cloudy woods,
Engendering other dreams.
Formless and soft beyond the fence it broods
Or rises as a faint and rotten musk
Out of a broken stalk.
There are some things of which we seldom talk;

For instance, the woman next door, whom we hear at night,
Claims that when she was small
She found a man stone dead near the cedar trees
After the first snowfall.
The air was clear; he seemed in ultimate peace,
Except that he had no eyes. Rigid and bright
Upon the forehead, furred
With a light frost, crouched an outrageous bird.

Anthony Hecht

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NOTHING IS EVER LOST

Nothing is ever lost completely in my life,
no summer falls forever to shadows of the night:
my heart knows how to call so many birds by name—
my orchards have not been abandoned to the wilds.

In the autumn woods a wall of leaves is burning;
I am devoured by a squirrel's round black eye.
Optician of love, geometer of tears,
what world lies, born of me, within its eyelash cradle?

Stone is the closed eye of the immobile earth.
In the nocturnal prison where its cristal grows
my lightning glance fires its potency.

Each time the day takes wing my eyelids fly away,
thrushes build their nests in the least of my words,
on the tip of my fingers a star palpitates.

Claude Vigee
(*translated by Patricia Terry*)

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Frank Kermode

THE HOUSE OF FICTION:

Interviews with Seven English Novelists

These conversations are abridged from longer talks; they were entirely free and unprepared. In cutting them I have naturally preferred to leave out whatever seemed most remote from the center represented by the title. If this seems a somewhat abstract topic, I can only say that it proved reasonably easy to keep the mind of the contributors fixed upon it. Clearly it is a relationship that they all think about in a more or less abstract way, as well as handling it daily in terms of technique.

I planned to ask each of the novelists about this abstract issue, and then to get them on to the subject of their own books. Sometimes this method didn't work, and the two questions got involved with each other, beneficially I think. Though there were no striking divergencies of opinion, there were considerable and interesting differences of emphasis. But if I had to decide what this selection of good living English novelists had most obviously in common I should say it was a kind of modesty. Not only do they emphasize their own limitations; for the most part they're happy to ignore all the larger claims that can be made for their craft. Obviously none of them subscribes to apocalyptic views such as Lawrence's: "Being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet. The novel is the one bright book of life." There is probably no living English novelist who even wants to believe that. Again, though none of them would accept the old criterion of naturalism unrevised, none on the other hand throws it out with the arrogance of Gide: "Please understand, I should like to put everything into my novel." The old realism will not do nor the old formalism, for none of these writers sees himself as making a universe. Each looks out, as if from one of the windows of James's house of fiction—"a number of possible windows not to be reckoned," as he said—and senses not merely that reality has the limited shape of his window, but also that he has a deep obligation to things as they are—on a not too extraordinary view of them.

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For this modesty has a philosophical aspect, too. You might expect that English writers would partake of the national character, at any rate to the extent of dodging discussion of the metaphysics of their form. In fact they were all willing to talk about such matters. But they did so in a peculiarly modest way. Just as they avoid the idea of the novel as an image of all reality, so they don't seem to think of their imaginative powers as a component of or even as a complement to reality. Indeed their concern with this problem seems on the whole strongly ethical rather than epistemological, as we see for instance in Mrs. Spark's discriminations between truth and absolute truth, between one kind of lie and another which you render harmless by calling it a story. Not for the English novelists the sophisticated epistemology of the new French writers (of whom few of our subjects were willing, by the way, to speak). Not for them the banner of the antinovel. A French author—M. Butor for instance—might have said that a novel contributes substantially to reality and that a new writer's task might always be seen to be the correction of obsolete versions of reality imposed by earlier novels (hence any good novel is an antinovel). But for the most part our authors see the whole problem of the relation between fiction and reality in terms of their own struggle to be faithful to themselves as perceivers and to fact, as perceived by the eye of informed commonsense. Some of them have performed extraordinary feats of construction—I think here especially of Mr. Greene—yet it will be observed that the names of Conrad and Ford Madox Ford are not so much as mentioned. There already exist learned articles with such titles as "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier," and there is no reason why someone should not write similarly about *The End of the Affair;* but for Mr. Greene this is an inconceivable activity, and though what he says about himself has strong roots in Turgeniev and James, he thinks of the problem as largely his own, and in the first place technical rather than as a matter for philosophic enquiry.

I

It seemed to me that a recent article by Miss Iris Murdoch expressed most of the issues we wanted discussed in a clear, usable way. Most of the contributors did in fact find her terminology convenient, so we began with what she said about it. The antithesis of "crystalline" and "journalistic," plot and myth, will in fact echo through the conversations.

I first asked Miss Murdoch to enlarge on one of her points, this distinction between "crystalline" and "journalistic" modes:

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MURDOCH: It's one of these epigrammatic distinctions which are probably themselves rather inexact. This distinction was suggested to me in a way by worrying about my own work and about what was wrong with it. There is a tendency, I think, on the one hand, and especially now, to produce a closely-coiled, carefully constructed object wherein the story rather than the people is the important thing, and wherein the story perhaps suggests a particular, fairly clear moral. On the other hand, there is and always has been in fiction a desire to describe the world around one in a fairly loose and cheerful way. And it seemed to me at present in the novel that there was a flying apart of these two different aims. Some ideal state of affairs would combine the merits of both.

KERMODE: You spoke of the consolation of form in your article as being a deceptive presentation of reality. Is this a certain kind of form? It doesn't apply to the sort which combines crystalline and journalistic, but only to the crystalline sort?

MURDOCH: This is a delicate question. It's almost absurd to say that form in art is in any sense a menace, because form is the absolute essence of art. But there can be a tendency too readily to pull a form or a structure out of something one's thinking about and to rest upon that. The satisfaction of the form is such that it can stop one from going more deeply into the contradictions or paradoxes or more painful aspects of the subject matter.

KERMODE: You didn't want myth to the degree that it interferes with the representation of character in a rather old-fashioned sense?

MURDOCH: Yes, this is perhaps my main thought in that article you referred to. I think that it would be coming back to character in the old-fashioned sense which would save one from being too readily consoled.

KERMODE: You also say that writers write what they can and not what they should. May I ask you whether in work that you perhaps have in hand there's any attempt to carry out this program?

MURDOCH: I always attempt to carry it out but I find it very difficult to do so.

KERMODE: Because of the strength of the myth?

MURDOCH: This sounds pretentious, as if one were thinking of one's work in a rather grandiose way, but yes, I suppose it is. Another way of putting it would be just that one isn't good enough at creating character. One starts off—at least I start off—hoping every time that this is going to happen and that a lot of people who are not me are

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going to come into existence in some wonderful way. Yet often it turns out in the end that something about the structure of the work itself, the myth as it were of the work, has drawn all these people into a sort of spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one's own mind.

KERMODE: Yes. And in so far as they are absorbed into that, they lose identity.

MURDOCH: I think this tends to happen.

KERMODE: So that the myth is a sort of safety net under the tightrope?

MURDOCH: Well yes, if you put it so, it's a form of safety. I don't take a low view of it. I think it can be important and beautiful; but I think it comes more easily to writers now than the other thing.

KERMODE: Yes. And although myth is in itself, as you say, a high matter, if it is ultimately something that distorts reality, then it is the enemy, however dignified, of the kind of novel that you feel ought to be written.

MURDOCH: Well, not altogether the enemy. It should be present also. It's perhaps the thing which at the moment one should guard against giving in to.

KERMODE: One of the more sensible definitions of myth in this connection would be one which allowed it to look after itself, wouldn't it?

MURDOCH: Yes.

KERMODE: May I now bring the discussion a little closer to your own books? Would you feel free to say that in your books since *Under the Net* there has been any movement towards the kind of fiction that you say ought to be written?

MURDOCH: It's very hard to say. Leaving aside the question of whether they're better or worse or anything—well, I don't know that you can leave this question aside quite, but trying to leave it aside—I think they oscillate rather between attempts to portray a lot of people and giving in to a powerful plot or story. I think the last one, *A Severed Head,* probably represents a giving in to the myth; and the previous one, *The Bell,* has more people in it; and the one I've just written now I think again has more people in it. But it's always rather a problem. Given that one hasn't achieved the kind of synthesis which I think is desirable and which would make one's stuff of some use, there is a tendency to oscillate between achieving a kind of intensity through having a very powerful story and sacrificing character, and having the characters and losing the intensity.

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KERMODE: It might seem, perhaps, using myth in too crude a sense, that there was more of it, or that it was more openly to be met with in *The Bell* and *The Severed Head* than in *Under the Net,* for example.

MURDOCH: *Under the Net* has in fact got its own myth, but I think it probably just hasn't emerged very clearly in the story.

KERMODE: It's a philosopher's novel?

MURDOCH: In a very simple sense. It plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention. And Hugo is a sort of non-philosophical metaphysician who is supposed to be paralyzed in a way by this problem.

KERMODE: And you set this novel quite deliberately in places which are given a good deal of actuality, in London and Paris, for example, as I remember it rendered in some detail.

MURDOCH: That was just self-indulgence. It hadn't any particular significance.

KERMODE: The technical excursions which we all like so much in your novels, how a car turns over, or how you get a bell out of a lake and so on, are they also self-indulgence under this very strict definition?

MURDOCH: Yes. That is just a kind of fascination with completely theoretical amateur mechanics.

KERMODE: Well, someone will come along and call them a myth all the same.

MURDOCH: Of course the bell itself has significance, and is quite explicitly used as a symbol by the characters. But I think the majority of my "technical excursions" are pure play.

II

Miss Murdoch, then, finds it clear that the trouble nowadays lies in an over-willingness to depend upon "myth," and that this premature dependence is falsely consoling; that it takes the bitter flavor out of reality, reduces the identity of characters, and, morally speaking, is a self-indulgence on the part of the writer. Mr. Greene uses the term "myth" differently, and accordingly sees the whole problem in another light. In fact he almost echoes Turgeniev, who said, "I would, I think, rather have too little architecture than too much—when there's a danger of its interfering with my measure of the truth."

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KERMODE: Mr. Greene, in the book in which you describe the genesis of your last novel, *The Burnt Out Case,* you make this remark: "Am I beginning to plot, to succumb to that abiding temptation to tell a good story?" I'd like to ask you, if I may, in what sense the abiding temptation to tell a good story is to be regarded as inimical, as it presumably is, to the production of a good novel?

GREENE: I'm not sure that one can generalize on that; I feel it's inimical to *my* producing a good novel. My own wish always is to produce a central figure who represents some idea of reasonable simplicity—a mythical figure if you like. And the simplicity often gets damaged by plot making. For instance, if I can just illustrate a point from a book I don't like much called *The Heart of the Matter,* there one wanted to draw a fairly simple portrait of a man who was corrupted by his sense of pity. But in the course of that book, perhaps because one was rusty, not having written for some years during the war, one began to over-load the plot, and I felt the effect of the character was whittled away.

KERMODE: This is a curious comment on the terms plot and myth, because we have had Iris Murdoch telling us that she regarded myth as the great temptation to self-indulgence, when what one ought to be concerned with was the texture of reality. And you are really saying something which is not quite the opposite, but quite close to the opposite, aren't you?

GREENE: Yes, very nearly the opposite.

KERMODE: And it's interesting in that connection that Miss Murdoch's stories do, as she would put it herself, descend into myth-making from time to time, whereas you are a plot builder, are you not?

GREENE: And I would like to ascend into myth, but find my boots so often muddy with plot. My own feeling is that the nearest I came to hitting the mythical element was in *The Power and the Glory,* where I feel the plot was sufficiently simple for the main purpose of this story to remain clear throughout.

KERMODE: May I mention a novel of yours, which I especially admire, and which I dare say would incur your own criticism that it's too heavily plotted in a slightly different way? That's *The End of the Affair.* What do you feel about that?

GREENE: I like a lot of the book, but I made an appalling mistake, I think, in the last third of the book, which has always spoilt—though I don't read my books—any retrospective enjoyment I might have.

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KERMODE: It would be very interesting to know what you thought that mistake was.

GREENE: The introduction of something which had not got a natural explanation. I had intended a much longer last part of the book after the women had died, where there was to be a succession of coincidences, until the lover became maddened by the coincidences which would not cease. I found it very difficult to continue the book with the loss of the principal figure, and I foreshortened badly by introducing something which was not easily accountable for in natural terms.

KERMODE: This encourages me to believe that I am right in my own view of the book, which is that it is in a way a novel about plot making, isn't it—not only about a novelist making a plot, but about God making a plot?

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: And if you had put in these additional coincidences, you would have strengthened that element?

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: Of course I think in *The End of the Affair* God the novelist is quite a strong figure in the myth, as it were.

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: In *A Burnt Out Case,* for example, you didn't feel that your plot had that kind of function as a kind of mirror image of providence?

GREENE: No.

KERMODE: So this is a different case, in that the element of plot in it tends to be destructive rather than to augment the myth?

GREENE: Yes, in a curious way it was more simple plotting, wasn't it, than, say, *The Heart of the Matter*—less details, less events, less action. And yet what little action there was seemed to take too strong a part. Perhaps it would have seemed less plotted if there had been more plot.

KERMODE: I had intended to ask you whether you feel that there is a point beyond which you can't dispense with plot. I mean there obviously is such a point, but where does this point lie? On what you said at the beginning of our conversation, it would seem that the less plot a novel had, the better it was likely to be, broadly speaking.

GREENE: Yes, in a way I agree—but that's my feeling often when I'm trying to write a novel which conflicts with passionate liking for melodrama. And a reaction, when I was a young man, I suppose a reaction from the books of Virginia Woolf, where narrative was very subordinated to mood. And I still have a liking for action in the novel.

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KERMODE: But on the whole you think that the representation of reality, of the real truth about the world, in a novel is primarily the burden of what we have agreed to call myth?

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: And that plot on the whole is in opposition, at any rate, has to be controlled.

GREENE: Yes, it must be controlled. Because after all in *Tom Jones* there is a tremendous amount of plot, but it's subordinated the whole time to the main character, isn't it?

KERMODE: I suppose it's a good case of a novel in which you have a strong myth of a rather ethical cast, and also an extremely complex plot, well timed, and thoroughly worked out and so on.

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: Without any sense that the things collide; in fact when they do seem to collide, as in the case of Sophia's muff on the bed, for example, they have a very strong ethical flavor.

GREENE: Yes.

KERMODE: And this is the direction in which you would like to . . .

GREENE: I would like to be able to write.

KERMODE: So in fact there is no real argument against having very complex plots?

GREENE: No, as long as it does not damage the mythical center.

III

Mr. Greene is very actively torn between his ethical myth, a matter largely of character, of "showing my people," as Turgeniev said; but unlike Turgeniev, who was short on "story," he regards plot as his self-indulgence, much as myth is Miss Murdoch's. When I asked Angus Wilson about the relation between myth and the significant rendering of "real life," he said this:

WILSON: That is an essential problem for me. It seems to me that all the novelists that I value have projected a real world which is nevertheless entirely their own vision. How far this will coincide with a myth which they may also discover in life I'm not quite so sure. One shouldn't be too careful about bringing this myth out, because I think it will come through, so long as you are absolutely true to your own vision of life. Of course you must shore yourself up with little bits of facts about real life. The myth element has grown stronger with me as I've written. It was there very strongly in *Hemlock* but I didn't try to bring it out, although the title after all does so. It was there in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, and now I have really tried

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to deal with the myth in a very much more allegorical way in my last novel.

KERMODE: So on the whole, apart from the last novel, you would say that the deliberate distortion of reality is not one of your aims?

WILSON: No. I'm immensely interested, as you know from my novels, in the shaping of the total novel, but not to reduce life to some sort of formal pattern. I think what I want to do is quite other. It is to amass various reactions to life, strong reactions, to amass various distortions and caricatures, scenes, pictures, and to bombard my readers with these things, having previously, I hope, put them into as strict a formal pattern in the sense of a designed novel as I possibly can. That is why I think people are mistaken when they ask what my novel is telling them. I don't believe, as Snow does, for example, in the didactic novel.

KERMODE: I sometimes have felt, although I wouldn't argue very strongly for this in your novels, that there is a degree of reality, of actuality in the representation of certain kinds of society which diminishes as one moves down the social scale.

WILSON: I think that might be true. The only plea for myself I would put in there is that even though this may be the case, it seems to me that I have a wider range than most novelists writing now. I do want to say something about the total society, and I can't refuse to do that simply because I'm not quite sure whether in working class homes today you still find those ladies with borzois on the ends of leads. I could go and find this out, probably, but that is not the way I would set about it. I would take a chance on it.

KERMODE: I don't think anybody would think that mattered, provided that the persons involved didn't seem to lose a certain degree of moral reality, if I can use that phrase. But on this question of middle-class, or, as I suspect many people would want to call them, upper middle-class characters in your books, there is a general idea, which one can understand, I think, that all Wilson's characters turn out nasty.

WILSON: I would have said that not all but a good number of the characters in my books are highly self-conscious. I'm interested in very self-conscious, self-aware people, and on the whole, like Miss Compton-Burnett's characters, they make their own judgment about themselves, almost before I can do so. But it's true that I do make some. Meg Eliot was for me a very heroic character and, if you like, she was a bit drawn from myself, much more so than any other character I've written about. She was the one who could face collapse most easily, but on the other hand she had this same kind of capacity

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for almost being stultified, as her brother even more so, by self-observation. I regard this as a disease, but a necessary disease, of civilized people. I agree that my characters may not often be entirely virtuous, or even entirely likeable, but they don't try to make themselves into God very much, or if they do, they are very much aware of it.

KERMODE: Yes, well this is a very George Eliot-like way to write books. (Laughter) I don't know if this strengthens the link between you and Mrs. Eliot at all.

WILSON: Well, I really don't know why one shouldn't try to write like George Eliot but I—

KERMODE: Not at all—except that when she wants characters to be nasty, even in a complicated way like Rosamund Vincey, she is nasty in a way recognizable by a great many people.

WILSON: Yes, yes.

KERMODE: Your notion of reality is more alien, perhaps, to that of many people than George Eliot's was.

WILSON: I suppose it is. I think that I'm a kinder person really than George Eliot: that is to say that my nasty characters get through better, but perhaps my good characters don't get through so well. I reduce people to a greyer level than she does probably.

KERMODE: You would say that the difference is really a kind of difference in reality rather than difference in your approach, that you have the same kind of approach to fiction, but what you are talking about is a different thing now.

WILSON: Well, I don't know that I would have the right to say that. I would say that there is a great deal of what you call the George Eliot approach. But above all that, and mixed with it, and perhaps swirling it round and distorting it and so on, is a great lump of a kind of Dickensianism, and this is the thing which distinguishes me from that sort of George Eliot writing: that I have got this—how can I say it—this grand guignol side. I am sure that I have in my character strong sadistic impulses which do come out in my books, and I try to choke that down when I see it in the books, but nevertheless that again is difficult because the modern world is a world in which sadistic impulses have run very rife. Therefore how am I to know whether they are mine, or those of the world in which I live?

IV

At the start of Mr. Wilson's remarks we have the already familiar notion, that myths should be left to look after themselves;

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of course the difficulty of this in our time is obvious. And he ends by suggesting that his own myth or fantasy may overthrow the whole antithesis on which I was basing the questions by representing not only a "sadistic impulse" in himself, but a pattern in contemporary reality: this amounts to a theory which it would be difficult to defend in so far as it would make universally valid, for instance, a schizophrenic's account of the world; but of course Mr. Wilson is also strongly and self-consciously concerned with the technical and moral problems of justly representing the facts.

It is a good notion, therefore, to turn now to a novelist whose myth might, at first blush, seem to flourish in rarefied isolation from the facts of contemporary existence, indeed its habits of speech and living. Miss Compton-Burnett, however, questions this: of all our contributors she is the most empirically minded; of course there has to be form, of course form doesn't distort reality. Neither does her dialogue.

COMPTON-BURNETT: A novel must have a form and has to be adapted in that way. I don't think that there is any way out of that.

KERMODE: I gather then that you would say that the mere act of devising a plot involves a degree of distortion of reality.

COMPTON-BURNETT: No, not distortion, but I think that it makes a frame to put reality in. I think the reality and the plot have to be adapted a little to each other, not distorted, I think. I don't see why it should.

KERMODE: Well, may I just take another aspect of your work which obviously comes to people's minds when they are thinking about this question, namely the nature of your dialogue, and the relative uniformity of dialect, shall we say. Among people of all classes, parents, children and so on.

COMPTON-BURNETT: It never seems to me that they talk alike, that the servants talk like the children, or that the children or the servants talk like the other people. Some people think they do, and some people think they don't. And I of course think they don't.

KERMODE: Well, I would say as a reader of your novels that they clearly are not talking exactly alike, but that they are all talking the same language.

COMPTON-BURNETT: We all do that, don't we?

KERMODE: Er—yes. Let me return to the word dialect then. They are all talking the same upper-class dialect.

COMPTON-BURNETT: I shouldn't have thought they did. You see, the servants echoed the other people. But I think—I think their talk has,

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or should have, quite a different—quite a different tone you know. But of course if people miss it, it may be my fault. Some people miss it, and some people don't. Miss it is perhaps my own word, you see.

KERMODE: Yes, in other words you would explain the similarity—as it falsely appears to me to be . . .

COMPTON-BURNETT: Yes, you put it rather unkindly from your point of view.

KERMODE: Well, let's be unkind to me. The similarity is really a symptom of a sociological situation.

COMPTON-BURNETT: Yes, I think it is, and I should have thought that the children talk quite differently. But children, you know, do really talk rather formally if you listen to them. Colloquialism comes later. It is what people pick up.

KERMODE: May I ask one thing again, with an attempt to save my position, and establish a certain degree of conventionality about the dialect that your people speak. I notice in a good many of your novels a tendency to use what in a play would be called an "aside," and not to observe the dramatic convention that the aside is never overheard; asides are always overheard in your dialogues.

COMPTON-BURNETT: Yes. I think they are. I put them in to have them overheard. I don't see how you can help it if you write a book that's —in my case—something rather between a novel and a play.

KERMODE: In one of your recent books, one of the characters says: "None of it is fit to be uttered aloud." Do you remember that remark? Do you think that that is true of most of your conversation?

COMPTON-BURNETT: Well—not most of it—some of it, I dare say. But I think if you write in dialogue, things must be uttered aloud, otherwise there is no book.

KERMODE: Now, just as you limit the text of your novel to dialogue largely, so you limit the scene of it, as everyone knows, to a particular kind of house, to a particular kind of family, at a time which most people would regard as being about sixty years ago, I suppose.

COMPTON-BURNETT: Yes. Well, I think that when that kind of time comes to an end, you know the time, you understand the time and know the life. But I think there is a lot of that life still left, you know—perhaps more in the country than in London—and I think that people will gradually join it, you know. I think that there is an ambition in a great many people to join that sort of life, and I think human relationships—although they may be more easy to depict and portray

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in a more or less narrow scene—I think in narrow scenes, in broad scenes, in any scenes, they must be the same.

KERMODE: You regard this kind of family history as archetypal?

COMPTON-BURNETT: No, I don't think I do. I think it must get modified as the years go by. But I think history will repeat itself—and it is beginning to repeat itself a little, and has never really stopped going on in the same way.

KERMODE: You're speaking now of the social conditions, and I'm speaking more of the relationship between parents and children.

COMPTON-BURNETT: I'm speaking of both.

KERMODE: But if one takes that pattern, it's interesting, for example, that the kind of society that you describe would possibly be rather similar to the kind of family life upon which Freud based his observations, so that there is this sense . . .

COMPTON-BURNETT: I think family life will always have its own essence you know. *If* people have family life. They tell me—of course I don't know if it is true—that some parents leave their children entirely to the state, and there isn't so much family life; but of course I shouldn't meet those people, you see. I think really family life goes on.

KERMODE: Oh yes. Some of the incidents that occur in the families in your novels aren't of the sort that occur in ordinary families perhaps.

COMPTON-BURNETT: They might occur—I think they did occur more than people know.

KERMODE: So that you would want to say, would you, that for example in the book *A Heritage and its History,* the seduction of the old man's wife by his son, and the consequent embroilment in another generation, that is the kind of thing that you would regard as a not too improbable aspect of family . . . ?

COMPTON-BURNETT: I think it might happen.

KERMODE: What we see is the normal tension that exists in families, in a very pure state.

COMPTON-BURNETT: Yes—er—yes in a way. Perhaps it is rather keyed up, and a plot has to be imposed if you like because a book must have a form, you see.

KERMODE: Of course, and the similarity between your plots and certain ancient plots which has sometimes been pointed out is because families are always alike.

COMPTON-BURNETT: I think so. But it is true that I was classically educated, and it is possible that I was influenced without knowing it. It isn't conscious. It is true that I read Greek plays when I was young.

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KERMODE: So, on the whole, you wouldn't want to say, as some novelists do, that there is an element of myth construction in your plots?
COMPTON-BURNETT: No, I don't think I should.

V

If life isn't like her novels, Miss Compton-Burnett suggests, it was and it will be again and she cannot be bothered to discuss the conventions which distinguish her manner, since to imagine them away is to imagine away the books. Similarly, she will have no nonsense about myth. Yet her characters themselves have been known to pause and consider how absurd it is for them to have got into such primitive situations; and the truth as one sees it in her books seems to be that Miss Compton-Burnett is endlessly aware of the remarkable artifice of her plots and the implications, moral and aesthetic, of her procedures.

For another view of the myth-fact relation we turn to C. P. Snow, who alone of all the contributors does in a sense write the antinovel, in that he is continuously in reaction from the formalist myth-makers of the Twenties and Thirties. He starts by trying out Miss Murdoch's terms "journalistic" and "crystalline" on Tolstoi.

SNOW: Now Tolstoi, for instance, if he comes into either of these categories, certainly must come into the journalistic. That makes me suspicious of the entire dichotomy.

KERMODE: Yes. Miss Murdoch doesn't indeed want novels to be either of these things. She is just as opposed to the crystalline, as I understand her, as she is to the other kind.

SNOW: Yes. Then absence of formal restriction is a thing I find slightly bewildering. You can't invent mystery, it seems to me.

KERMODE: Now, Sir Charles, if this distinction were workable, I suppose we should want to place your novels a little nearer, allowing for the pejorative sound of the word, to the journalistic rather than the crystalline. Would this be fair?

SNOW: Oh, certainly.

KERMODE: Does this mean that you have some kind of mistrust of formal patterning and the suggestions of myth and so on in novels?

SNOW: I'll have to distinguish between those two. I have no objection to formal patterning, and indeed I think it can give great strength to a novel, and a great many novels which would come under the journalistic side of this division would have deep formal patterning. Myth I'm much more suspicious of—unless it comes quite naturally

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and innately. I don't believe you can put in the myths any more than you can put in the symbols.

KERMODE: On the whole you would certainly at any rate reject the idea of a discontinuity between the real world—in the terms which we are using in this discussion—and the reality of the novel. They must be continuous?

SNOW: Yes, yes, quite certainly. Here of course we are begging terms in using the word "real" like that, but I think we both know what we mean.

KERMODE: May we pass on to the idea of novels considered as social history—novels as related very closely and continuously to fact. Would you say that your novels have some kind of meaning in these terms?

SNOW: I should think they have some meaning. That is, I believe that persons live in their time, and they are tagged down by their time, and if you try to loosen their feet from that particular earth, then you get them wrong. But a novel is never really social history in the exact sense. Even the novels which seem deeply documentary, like Balzac's, really are much further away from real social history than many of us think, and I believe that's also true of mine.

KERMODE: To what degree would you say that your being a scientist has conditioned the view of reality that you propose in your books?

SNOW: Quite a bit. How much, it is harder for me to say than it would be for you. But certainly part of my training would make me suspicious of a lot of the categories which certain writers think in, and also would give me, I think, a rather simpler view of the kind of truth which I should like to aim at.

I believe there are certain things you can say about people in their society which are—slightly begging the terms but not too much—which are objectively true. That is, people are like that in those places at that time. Their temperaments are like that, and their reaction on their environment, and their environment's reaction on them, can be with some kind of accuracy stated. Now I believe a realistic novelist ought to do that, often does do it. And that seems to me not grossly dissimilar from the scientific process, or a part of the scientific process. At least, the spirit behind it is not grossly different.

KERMODE: So that the degree to which you impose, have to impose, formal patterns on reality when you make fiction of any sort, does not seem to you to distort that reality, any more than a scientific experiment would do?

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SNOW: To an extent more, but not grossly more. I mean the sort of formal patterns of narrative which are very impotant in a novel to an extent, of course, are slightly neater than anything you get in a slice of documentary life, but I don't think it need affect the particular persons, or even the particular scenes, which are really the bread and butter and the heart of the novel.

KERMODE: So that one can't draw any analogy between what you do as a novelist and the degree of distortion that I believe is involved in some kinds of physical experiment. It is the different kind of change that the mind induces in the facts.

SNOW: Yes, I think that is actually a very deep question, because the degree of abstraction, of course, at which physical experiments have to be thought of and constructed is so very far away from the immediate world of reality that the same conditions don't apply. But I think a certain amount of the same spirit can and probably does apply. I would have thought what Tolstoi was trying to do in *War and Peace,* and to an extent what George Eliot tried to do in *Middlemarch,* is very deeply near the spirit of certain scientific processes. Tolstoi wanted to tell a lot of truths, and none of them imagined truths, and none of them things which he was drawing from myth, or drawing from a particular shaping of his own interior experience. He wanted to say that this and this happened, this person behaved so; how they were moved by the mysterious forces of history was deeply occupying him. But this was all going to be expressed, or this was at least the intention, in terms of particular persons in particular situations. And this seemed to me to have the degree of objectivity which you don't get in, say, physical science, I think, so much as, say, in the more observational sciences, like some parts of biology.

KERMODE: I gather from what you say that you don't feel with, say, the new novelists in France that the novel itself has imposed a kind of conventionalized reality upon us, and that this has become evidently obsolete and a new way of looking is required.

SNOW: Well, you know as well as I do, this was being said with the utmost vigor about 1917, by our Bloomsbury forebears. It was exactly the same doctrine which was propounded by Dorothy Richardson, by Virginia Woolf and what not, and it made the novel totally meaningless in a very short time. And some of my colleagues and I have to spend quite a lot of time—unnecessary time—getting rid of that particular legacy and finding a different way of doing things. And I think that in fact it's a curious example of French provincialism that they should think that this is new.

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VI

Sir Charles, of course, robustly opposes the notion that there is anything special about the problem of reality in novels, and even the notion that the novel to any serious extent translates fact into its own conventional notations. His own books, most people would say, have their myth or mystique; but he believes that this is to be inferred from an honest account of people behaving, rather than "put in" by the author. This "neo-realist" view evidently exercises a powerful appeal at the moment. A much younger writer, with a strong interest in Arnold Bennett, is John Wain; and he certainly does not believe that myth has a free hand with reality; indeed reality is for him something you stand firmly outside of, that you select from.

WAIN: I don't believe that there is one fixed reality. I think that there is the huge flux of raw experience, experiences of every kind—personal experience, political experience, philosophical, physical, emotional experience. It is all there as a raw welter. All you can do is to select the bit you feel you can handle at the moment, and devise some means of handling it, and make a complete start. So many writers, even quite good ones, write the same book over and over again. And the great danger is that if they keep on doing it year after year, they will begin to feel that the kind of reality they are presenting is something genuinely fixed. I don't really believe it is fixed.

KERMODE: Now, you write other kinds of books besides novels. But just because you think the novel imposes a certain fixed view, fixed within very wide limits of reality, and that this doesn't always please you, you want to do other things?

WAIN: There are certain kinds of experience, and certain kinds of perception, which are very well suited to be handled with certain kinds of form. For instance, Virginia Woolf's criticism of Arnold Bennett resolved itself into the point that the realistic novel will take care of certain kinds of experience, and other kinds simply can't be caught in that particular scoop, and she wanted to propose another kind of scoop, which I don't think is a valid point at all. The only thing is a complete freedom of attitude, where you are ready to pick up any form once you've taken the trouble to train yourself in any form, whether it be the realistic novel, the romantic or surrealist novel, the play, the ballet, the circus—I don't care what it is as long as you are ready to pick up the form that will take the piece of reality that you have in mind.

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KERMODE: Now, may we talk for a moment or two about your novels? A lot of the other people have suggested that there's something they tend to call myth, which is a kind of pattern that their own mind imposes, and which occasionally falsifies the truth, as they sometimes see afterwards. Do you feel that in your novels you've ever indulged yourself in myth in this way, and have you found it a problem?

WAIN: Not all my novels come equally close to being more or less readable and successful, and in one particular case, which is a very bad book, I did impose a certain interpretation upon the events I was going to write about before I wrote about it, and my perception of the way characters actually work and exist, and the way things really work out, was tied from the beginning to an intellectual concept.

KERMODE: What about the odd exception, or apparent exception, as in William Golding, for example, where a series of events clearly suggests a myth, and a myth suggests a series of events which don't in their extent go very much beyond the scope of that myth—at least that would seem to be the way he works?

WAIN: William Golding, a writer I admire enormously, is not a novelist as far as I can see. He is an allegorist. He has certain perceptions about the human condition which he, I should imagine at a guess, goes ahead and creates an allegory to represent.

KERMODE: But you were saying how loose the novel and how undefined a thing it is; is there no reason why this kind shouldn't be included presumably as well as the kind you've been describing?

WAIN: You go a long way before you reach a frontier in the novel, but you do finally reach one; and at the point where you ultimately come up against a frontier, Mr. Golding's work is still beyond it, I think.

KERMODE: And what about the frontier on the other side—the frontier where Arnold Bennett is on the novel side of it. What would you place on the far side of it?

WAIN: The newspaper.

KERMODE: Ah, but something that's as near to being a novel, as William Golding's books are?

WAIN: No, because the realistic novel as understood by French writers who invented it, and by writers like Bennett who took it over, is in fact right on the very edge of the newspaper report. It's simply the newspaper report which did not actually take place and which is done at enormous length and with complete fullness of detail.

KERMODE: Finally, holding the views that you've expressed as I under-

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stand them, it is not one of your problems to worry about whether you are distorting reality by the mere act of imposing a form upon it?

WAIN: Distorting it, no. Scooping it out with a specially shaped scoop, yes. I feel like a mouse biting into some gigantic cheese. There is the cheese—mile upon mile of it—at least as big in relation to me as Mount Everest is physically, and I am doing all right if I can take a piece of this cheese and shape it into anything; because the whole object of writing is to tell the truth and if you can tell any portion of the truth, and continue to make it truthful, although you are putting it into literary form, then goodness me, that is enough.

VII

The mouse and the cheese is a homely allegory of fiction-writing on the borders of fact, as far as possible from the crystalline or mythic pole. Our last contributor, though, upsets these categories by saying, very reasonably, that myth *is* plot, myth is what you make up about reality. What seems to concern Muriel Spark more than the myth-fact antithesis is a much purer and much more ancient issue, which lies behind all these conversations, and is, simply, are novelists liars? If not, what kind of truth are they telling?

SPARK: To me the plot is the basic myth. I don't know much about myths, you see. If I think of a plot, I take it for granted that that's a myth. I don't bother about myths apart from that, but I hope that a plot's got something universal in it.

KERMODE: May I bring into the conversation a particular book of yours, *The Comforters,* because here we have something which is very handy to the whole discussion, including what other people have said. This is a book in which you've got your myth, but you've deliberately made it in a sense a game about novels, haven't you? There you are—the novelist herself is mixed up in the story, keeps on breaking in. Is this because you've got a kind of interest in the form of fiction, which some people rather morally think extrudes reality from the whole thing? It becomes a game instead of a transcript?

SPARK: No, I don't think so. It really depends on the fact that this book *The Comforters* was my first novel. I was asked to write a novel, and I didn't think much of novels—I thought it was an inferior way of writing. So I wrote a novel to work out the technique first, to sort of make it all right with myself to write a novel at all—a novel about writing a novel, about writing a novel sort of thing, you see. I think that the set-up of my writing is probably just a justification

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of the time I wasted doing something else. And it is an attempt to redeem the time, you see.

KERMODE: You use the word "wasted" advisedly do you?

SPARK: It wouldn't be wasted if I had my way. It won't be wasted—it won't be known to be wasted until I'm dead.

KERMODE: The novels that you've written since *The Comforters* have not had quite this wantonness, as I called it, about the form which you are employing, though they've had some.

SPARK: Yes. Well, because I observed a kind of wantonness, as you call it, I decided the best thing to do was to stick to a plot, and stick to a formal outline and say what I wanted to say in that limit. And then I decided that I was writing minor novels deliberately, and not major novels. An awful lot of people are telling me to write big long novels—Mrs. Tolstoy, you know—and I decided it is no good filling a little glass with a pint of beer.

KERMODE: You tend to pick not a Tolstoyan society, but a rather limited society of very old people, for example. Is this because the other things are on too big a scale for what you want to do ?

SPARK: Well, partly because of my own temperament, and my own constitution. When I become interested in a subject, say old age, then the world is peopled for me—just peopled with them. And it is a narrow little small world, but it's full of old people, full of whatever I'm studying. They're the center of the world, and everyone else is on the periphery. It is an obsession until I've finished writing about them. And that's how I see things. I wrote a book about bachelors and it seemed to me that everyone was a bachelor. It is true, just strangely enough, those people come my way while I am writing—I don't take a long time, so it is not difficult.

KERMODE: And you don't feel that is necessary to explain the difference between this temporary world and the permanent one in terms of saying that you are a writer of fantasy, that you might as well make the world full of insects, or of very large or very small men?

SPARK: I don't claim that my novels are truth—I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. And I keep in my mind specifically that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth—absolute truth—and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of the truth—something inventive. I don't say that such and such a person lived and such and such a person crossed the road, simply because I write it—in a court of law it wouldn't carry any weight, and it's not true, what I write is not true—it is a pack of lies. There is metaphorical truth

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and moral truth, and what they call anagogical, you know, the different sorts of truth; and there is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but I believe them because they are absolute. And this is one aspect of truth, perhaps. But in fact if we are going to live in the world as reasonable beings, we must call it lies. But simply because one puts it out as a work of fiction, then one is not a liar. I do think that this ought to be recognized by people. People get very annoyed if you say look here Goldilocks and the three bears is a pack of lies.

KERMODE: One of the many senses in which the word myth has been used in these discussions is to cover this unconscious element in any story and any plot—and a lot of people seem to think that the quicker you get down to this level the better the book is going to be, and some others, like Iris Murdoch, think that the minute that you lapse into it, you've started writing badly, self indulgently.

SPARK: Perhaps she is right. I think the best thing is to be conscious of everything that one writes, and let the unconscious take care of itself, if it exists, which we don't know. If we knew it, it wouldn't be the unconscious. I think you should be as conscious as possible of what you are doing, and never give in to the temptation—it comes upon most writers—of "Oh, I did that wonderfully—now I must go on doing that unconsciously." It is terribly wrong. The unconscious is completely limitless. The best thing is to know what you are doing, I think.

KERMODE: It's an old charge that poets are liars, and we include novelists among poets; and the old defence is that he nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth. Is this very much what you have been saying in this conversation?

SPARK: Yes, I think so. I think that the novelist is out just to say what happened. I express it in the past tense, but in the actual process, as far as I am concerned, it happens in the present tense. Things just happen and one records what has happened a few seconds later. I don't mean, of course, that one is that recording instrument that Blake thought of himself, just a kind of medium between the angels and the creatures, but I do know events occur in my mind, and I record them. Whether it fits in with this theory, that theory, this myth, that myth, has nothing to do with me.

For Mrs. Spark the novel is true because it happens in the author's mind as he writes; in this sense it is a completely accurate transcript of events, and as an account of character not to be faulted.

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It may be a corollary of this that the outside world becomes, momentarily for such a novelist, a world populated by a limited class of persons behaving in unusual ways; but the novelist is not affirming this, and in any case distinguishes between absolute truth (revealed religion) and other less important kinds of truth, of which the novel might produce one.

This is a question which will look different according as you believe or do not believe in absolute truth. Yet to the agnostic Wilson and the Catholic Spark the "myth" is something best left to take care of itself; whereas to Miss Murdoch it is a temptation to abandon uncompleted the great task of exploring personality; and I have an idea that Miss Murdoch would include Mrs. Spark's "absolute truths" among the myths because they too "break bitter furies of complexity." On the other hand, to Mr. Greene it is precisely those furies of complexity that damage the important thing, the central static myth.

The house of fiction has many windows, but at any given period they may all be designed as variations on a few basic shapes. What you see from them varies more considerably within these limits: irreducibly complex personalities, a sadistic landscape, a gaunt country house full of secrets that cannot survive the preternatural explicitness of the inhabitants, a mountain of cheese. And for the most part the people at present standing at these windows are content to say "My window is shaped thus and thus," rather than "all windows should be myth-shaped or fact-shaped"—there may be above all a God-shaped window giving perfect all-round visibility, but theirs is in no case held to resemble it.

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George Lichtheim

THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM

I

In 1945 it was widely thought in Western Europe that socialism was at last about to come into its own. In 1963 socialist, or social-democratic, parties hold office, alone or jointly with others, in a number of European countries, but the utopian expectations of the Resistance period have withered, and it is now tacitly accepted that the proper business of socialists is to make the planned economy work. In 1945 it was likewise thought that democratic socialism would become the principal rival of Soviet communism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and some hopeful spirits—notably the late Aneurin Bevan—felt there was a good chance of winning that particular contest. In 1963 the flickering remnant of these hopes is bound up with Nehru's uncertain hold on an India at loggerheads with China, and even so it is pretty plain that the force sustaining him is Indian nationalism rather than faith in democracy. Whether one looks West or East, confidence in the unstoppable onward march of democratic socialism has had a great deal of water poured into it. One now finds it said—notably by West Europeans—that socialism is not for export; here and there it is even suggested that it may not be fully workable even in its traditional homeland.

While this mood of caution clearly reflects the impact of experience, it is also sustained by theoretical considerations having to do with the operation of a planned economy in a pluralist society of the Western type. For the purpose of this particular argument it is unnecessary to consider the problem presented by the United States, since by common

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is part of* PR's *discussion on the problems of the cold war and the future of the West. Comment is invited.*

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consent dissatisfaction with the status quo in the USA has not—or at any rate not yet—reached the point where the market economy is seriously called into question. It is of course a commonplace of socialist theorizing that this point cannot be very far off, but we need not inquire whether this is so. True or not, it has no bearing on the theoretical case for and against the conventional socialist assumptions about what lies beyond a market economy. This case can be argued in abstraction from the particular political and social conditions prevalent in the two halves of the Western world; just as it can be argued without reference to the Soviet orbit, which has "skipped" the stage of fully developed capitalism. The actual circumstances must of course be re-inserted into the picture after the abstract "model" has been worked out; but this is a fairly simple operation, once it is understood that we are talking about a certain general arrangement of society, with special reference to the operation of a planned economy. We may then say that the system "works" or fails to "work" owing to specific factors, or else that a different system is still in place and unlikely to be dislodged for some time. This kind of reasoning always sounds boring to people who have no theoretical inclinations, but once the ground has been cleared it is possible to get back to common-sense considerations. It can even be held that common sense enters directly into the theoretical side of the matter, inasmuch as it depends on the electorate whether the "model" can be operated at all.

A good instance of what is meant by this is suggested by the recent behavior of democratic electorates in Western Europe, notably in highly industrialized countries such as Britain or Sweden. In the latter country, Social-Democratic governments have been in power almost without interruption since 1932, but have taken no significant steps to "socialize" the economy—*i.e.*, to abolish private ownership and the market—though they have been very active in expanding the welfare state, maintaining full employment, and promoting rapid economic growth. In Britain, the electorate since 1951 has not favored the Labor Party, and to the extent that it has recently begun to swing back to it, it has done so in a mood which seems to preclude anything more ambitious than the Swedish example. It is beginning to look as if the next Labor government in Britain will be held to a "social-democratic" interpretation of its program (full employment plus the welfare state) rather than a "socialist" one. These limitations are largely imposed by impersonal economic conditions having to do with Britain's dependence on exports and the difficulty of preventing a large-scale flight of capital,

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but they also seem to correspond to popular moods and expectations, as well as to the unspoken assumptions of the managerial stratum which will have to operate the mixed economy under any government: Labor, Liberal, or Tory. Insofar as it can be plausibly asserted that the electorate —which in Britain is predominantly working-class and overwhelmingly salaried (if office workers are included)—does not want anything beyond full employment and adequate social services, this common-sense consideration helps to clarify what one means when one is talking about the prospects of democratic socialism. For clearly a system is not democratic if it has to be imposed upon an unwilling majority. If the British experience is conclusive, we shall have to say that there is not, in the foreseeable future, a working majority for anything that goes significantly beyond the mixed economy and the welfare state. But the mixed economy by definition is not socialism, if by socialism one means a state of affairs where the principal means of production are owned either by the state or by some other organ of the community.

Of course all these terms are conventional: one may define "socialism" differently, in which case one will come up with different conclusions. The customary terms have the advantage, though, that their meaning is fixed and easily comprehensible, whereas individual notions as to what constitutes socialism—*e.g.*, "social justice" or "equality"—suffer from the drawback that anyone may interpret them as he chooses. After all, Hitler laid claim to the socialist label, and Colonel Nasser has proclaimed that Egypt is now a socialist republic because "the big reactionary capitalists" have been dispossessed. Such claims are only plausible as long as one fails to ask what the term socialism has traditionally meant to those who employed it, before it became fashionable and politically profitable to use it on all public occasions. When this question is asked, the answer defines itself in terms of fairly precise concepts, such as public ownership of the means of production, price-setting by economic planners, and investment decisions made by the public authorities. By applying this test one necessarily arrives at the conclusion that Western Europe has had certain socialist elements built into its structure since 1945 (and indeed before that date), but that it is not a socialist society and does not look like becoming one in the foreseeable future. One also sees that while the ruling groups of certain backward, pre-industrial, countries may derive an advantage from pinning the socialist label to themselves, they are not in fact promoting anything connected with the historic aims of either democracy or the labor movement.

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II

It may be argued that the distinctions so far drawn here are fluid and take insufficient account of the gradual "socialization" of economic life in all advanced industrial countries, including those, like the United States, that maintain an official or ideological resistance to the entire concept. There is a measure of truth in this, but the argument becomes misleading when it is taken to imply that the gradual addition of homoeopathic doses of welfare legislation will eventually transform a society based on private ownership into its opposite. A system based on private ownership of capital resources, corporate control of capital formation, and avoidance of overall planning, does not turn into its own opposite simply because welfare services are expanded and paid for out of taxation. And even with the addition of central planning, it is not socialist unless the planning is democratic.

This point is important for an understanding of what it is that distinguishes socialists from communists on the one hand, and from some modern authoritarians on the other. Planning is now a very popular concept, but although a socialist economy must be a planned one, it does not follow that every planned economy is socialist. There was planning of sorts in "National-Socialist" Germany, and there is no lack of planning in the USSR: unfortunately it takes place without public participation. It may of course be argued that planning by its nature cannot be democratic, in which case democratic socialism must be written off as an illusion. Alternatively, we may say that the democratic planning experiments in Western Europe have not yet reached the point of really transforming the structure of society. They are, however, beginning to alter the balance of power, and in this circumstance lies the best hope socialist parties have in this generation. The impact already made by democratically controlled planning in Britain, France, Holland, Austria, Italy, and Sweden is not inconsiderable, and with luck this process may continue even where the planners have to work under non-socialist political direction. It is, if one likes, a case of economic logic creating its own political instruments, and in this sense much of Western Europe can now be said to be passing out of the liberal age: the term "liberal" signifying (as it does not always do in the United States) reliance on the market and uncontrolled private ownership.

Let us carry this argument one step further, so as to give the planners their full due. It is now a commonplace of European political discussion that all governments, whether Conservative, Social-Demo-

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cratic, Catholic-Socialist, or Gaullist, are increasingly drawn into the purposive direction of economic life. Where socialists share in power this requires no emphasis. Where they are in opposition, as in France, the same process goes on under different direction. It is accepted by good observers of the French scene that the Gaullist regime has given the "planning," "managerial," and "technocratic" forces a very considerable boost, as against the old-fashioned type of private enterprise whose political representatives are now in eclipse. The Gaullists themselves quite clearly regard themselves as a "modern" managerial party, and their more intellectual spokesmen are much given to variations on the theme of their being opposed to, and by, the more conservative strata of the bourgeoisie. From a somewhat different angle it can be argued that Gaullist notions about planning, and about the need to strengthen the executive, are in tune with some of the proposals made by their leading left-wing critic, Mendès-France. It has even been suggested that Gaullism and "Mendèsism" have something fundamental in common, and it seems to be a fact that both movements attract the same type of support from a section of the "technical intelligentsia." This sort of thing cuts across ordinary political alignments and is conceivably more important than journalistic speculations about the chances of another Popular Front. It amounts to saying that the real dividing line runs not between traditional conservatism and socialist radicalism, but between authoritarian and democratic forms of planning, or between some sort of planning and no planning at all. On this reading of the situation, which has the support of some leading French sociologists, Gaullism represents the "technocratic" version of the planned economy, while socialism (as understood by Mendès-France and the official Socialists, though not by the Communists) stands for a more democratic variant. It is perhaps not surprising that friendly critics of Mendès-France's recently published book *La République Moderne* see the matter in this light, since he himself plainly does. What is more remarkable is that independent observers, and prominent economists with socialist leanings but without pronounced political views, are coming round to the same conclusion. Since the French economy is becoming a planned one, it is not difficult to visualize a situation where political alignments will turn upon the modalities of planning and notably the problem of public control. Last year's political upheaval may have brought this line-up nearer, though the situation is confused by the presence of a Communist party with a mass following and an unreconstructed Stalinist leadership. Still, supposing there were to be a change in this respect—perhaps no greater than the recent shift in Italy, where the Communists have

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tacitly repudiated Stalinism and even accepted Italian membership of the Common Market—there would be the makings of a fairly healthy situation, with a predominantly democratic Left pitted against a somewhat authoritarian (but not totalitarian) Right: both sides being committed to economic planning from the center, and differing chiefly over the extent of popular participation and control.

So far as one can see at the moment, this in fact is the shape of things to come—and not only in France. It is clearly a much more interesting shape than the old ding-dong battle between bourgeois conservatism and socialist radicalism. For one thing, it holds out the hope that the Communists will have their totalitarian heritage pulled from under them, on pain of withering away and becoming a mere sect. For another thing, it suggests that the inevitable party-political dialectic between conservatism and radicalism will henceforth take place within an intellectual frame of reference that is no longer irrelevant to the real problems of modern industrial society. If one likes one can say that all concerned will be arguing over how to make the mixed economy work; one may also say that they will be arguing over the synthesis of freedom and control, liberalism and socialism, planning and the market. If this is now happening in France and Italy, after having already happened in England and Scandinavia, it will be a sign that the whole, or almost the whole, of Western Europe has got over its immediate post-1945 problems and is getting down to the real business of shaping the future. Against this background there seems to be no reason why socialist parties should not be buckling their second wind.

So far, so good. But when all this is conceded, it still remains uncertain whether the movement is in a direction that democratic socialists can welcome without reserve. There are conflicting pulls at work, and there is no guarantee that the democratic alternative will prevail. It can even be argued that the more important it becomes to establish "conscious control" over the economy, and the less this aim is resisted by conservatives and authoritarians, the more awkward the political choices to be made. If the system cannot be run properly on democratic lines, it may be run improperly on lines that are not democratic, or at any rate not liberal-democratic in the tradition associated with parliamentary government. Recent events in France are a pointer to this danger. Not that the Gaullist regime is undemocratic: the contrary assertion, at the moment rather fashionable, is part of the cold war waged by a section of the British press against Britain's tradi-

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tional rival, when it is not simply another example of left-wing hysteria about "dictatorship." But it is becoming increasingly plain that "planning à la française" (instituted under the ultra-democratic Fourth Republic with strong Socialist support) is by its own nature subversive of parliamentary government as hitherto understood. What in the end caused the Fourth Republic to collapse was not only the failure to control the Army, but the concurrent failure to control a semi-planned economy which demanded constant political decisions at the center. The Gaullist solution—presidential rule, with the President allotted powers undreamed in the United States—looks neat on paper, and is not in principle undemocratic, but if things went wrong it could easily become the focus of authoritarian direction beyond the point where the democratic forces are still able to maintain a healthy balance. The danger is not pressing at the moment, but it is not negligible. From the Left—in addition to confused noises and some nonsense about "personal power"—there has so far come only Mendès-France's constitutional project, which in some respects seems utopian (a Five Year Contract between the government and a hypothetical parliamentary majority committed to democratic socialism), and in other respects not far removed from Gaullism (abolition of the Senate and its replacement by a Chamber of Corporations!). It is apparent that both sides are still experimenting with institutional models which in the end may come to look reasonably democratic without being in all respects liberal-parliamentarian. If there is at present no corresponding debate in Britain, the reason is that Parliament—on paper anyhow—is still omnipotent and unchallengeable.

One may conclude this excursion into the theory and practice of present-day West European politics by saying that the case against democratic control of the planned economy has not been proved. The matter remains open to discussion because the choices are still open. For all one knows we may yet see a socialist government in a major European country, based on a democratic majority and capable of getting the nation's economic resources under control. It is possible that the next experiment will be made in Britain, though under circumstances less favorable than in 1945. It is even conceivable that it will be a success. One must hope so. The alternative is unattractive, and the consequence of repeated failure on the part of *all* major parties hardly bears contemplation. Even so stable a society as the British is bound to undergo serious strains if economic decline is added to loss of political power.

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III

If Britain under a Labor government may with luck become a "paradigm case" of democratically controlled planning under conditions of industrial maturity, India with its successive Five Year Plans and its official commitment to a "socialist pattern of society" stands at the other end of the scale. Until the recent politico-military upheaval it was still possible to regard the Nehru government's espousal of socialist aims as more than a conventional piece of verbalism or wish-fulfillment. Even today it is not certain that socialist ideals will vanish altogether from the consciousness of the governing party and the ruling stratum, *i.e.*, the political bureaucracy and the intelligentsia. The Indian bourgeoisie is weak, and conceivably the era of its predominance will be short even if after Nehru's departure the conservative wing of the Congress party takes over (with or without military help). Does it follow that India can or will offer a "paradigm case" for the "underdeveloped" countries? The term "under-development" is itself question-begging when applied to poor and overcrowded countries which for centuries, or even millennia, have suffered from the wrong sort of "development." It stands to reason that at the Indian level of poverty and illiteracy the first priorities must inevitably be economic rather than social; that is, they must have to do with rapid growth, not with equality. We know by now what this entails, even if Stalinism is avoided: there is pressure to put "first things first," and first things are defined—by the politically conscious minority which alone has power—in terms of maximum saving and maximum accumulation of capital. Whether or not this entails dictatorship, let alone totalitarianism, is debatable. It is at any event undesirable if one holds that "socialism" signifies the satisfaction of human needs, rather than break-neck modernization. Even if the pace is slowed down—as it must be if political democracy is to be preserved—long-range aims will conflict with short-term measures. Politicians may verbalize their loyalty to the final goal of socialism in terms that leave a margin for maneuver, but with the best will they cannot elude the need to concentrate resources upon the urgent task of capital investment, whether publicly or privately controlled. If full socialism (let alone communism) is defined in Marxian terms as a state of affairs in which socially owned wealth is adequate to support all civilized needs, it is evident that India cannot be socialist for a very long time to come.

Nor does it help to substitute some other definition, *e.g.*, public ownership of the means of production and central control; for this is only a means towards an end. No socialist would dream of contenting

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himself with the institutional fabric of central planning unless it were directed to the satisfaction of basic needs in a socially homogenous, *i.e.*, egalitarian, milieu. But this is just what a poor country in the process of modernization cannot provide, unless its development is subsidized from the outside on a scale beyond all practical reckoning. It is in any case hardly conceivable that an industrial revolution, whether under capitalist or socialist control, can go forward without creating enormous income inequalities, however temporary—and they may not be temporary! Indeed the Stalinist experience suggests that even the most rigid and terroristic political control cannot prevent the emergence of new classes as a direct consequence of the economic transformation itself. The reason is simple and obvious: industrialization is impossible without social mobility and the disruption of the relatively fixed and stable relationships governing village life, and even urban life, under more stationary conditions. The resultant upheaval is not conducive to that condition of egalitarian democracy at which socialists have traditionally aimed. If socialism means anything, it means the end of inequality and the substitution of non-economic goals for the aim of wealth accumulation. Yet a country like India, which must raise itself by its bootstraps, is obliged to sacrifice equality to growth, even if it means allowing new privileged classes (which need not be bourgeois) to accumulate wealth and power. Given that the resources are so meager and the needs so enormous, the planners cannot afford to encourage a degree of equality that might seriously interfere with capital accumulation. The Indian Plan does indeed provide for the protection of village crafts and cottage industries, thereby to some extent slowing down the development of mass-production in the consumer goods sphere, and who is to say that this concern for the individual and the small group is not preferable to Sino-Soviet ruthlessness? Considering the enormous pool of rural unemployment, it is anyhow mere common sense not to wreck the surviving village crafts. But it does not follow that a major diversion of scant resources from the urban to the rural sector is possible, and even if it were, it is not likely to be undertaken. Whether in war or in peace, under socialist or conservative direction, India is launched on a path which forbids the satisfaction of social aims at the expense of economic goals. Under conditions of severe economic scarcity, this choice implies both a throttling of consumer demand and the mobilization of surplus labor for the heavy-industry sector of the economy. It also implies serious brakes upon political democracy, even if not necessarily its complete disappearance. Centralized direction, and the concentration of political and intellectual energies upon the single task of

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ending poverty, must take precedence over the maintenance of a social balance designed to give every group or individual a reasonably equal share in the supply of goods; and it is the latter aim which defines the purpose of socialism, if indeed any unequivocal definition of so many-sided a concept can be undertaken.

It may be argued that this conception is arbitrary, and that socialism is quite simply an ethically neutral institutional pattern like capitalism, with the difference that control over the means of production, and over the process of production itself, is vested in a central authority. To an economist—whether a liberal in the tradition of Schumpeter and Mises, or a socialist of the Marxian or Fabian school—this may be an adequate definition, but it abstracts from social reality and is therefore incomplete. Institutions do not operate in a vacuum, and cannot be judged in purely functional terms, least of all when they are brought into being by a purposive act. But let us grant that "socialism" by itself merely signifies certain institutional arrangements which in principle might permit an entrenched group of planners to impose upon people a degree of material well-being much lower than—other things being equal—they would enjoy under a regime of private ownership. It would then be necessary to conclude that the traditional aims of socialism have not been achieved. This of course is quite possible, and indeed we have seen it happening in the USSR, but we also know that it has been due to the absence of democracy. It may be that a society in which the main resources are publicly owned will be despotic; it may also be that it will make available to the majority a degree of freedom from material pressure hitherto reserved for a privileged minority, and that this will conduce to greater political and personal liberty, rather than to less. One cannot deduce one or the other consequence from the concept of a centrally controlled economy. One can only say that the future is indeterminate in both respects, and that it will depend partly on circumstances, and partly on human volition, what use society is going to make of its new opportunities. But clearly these opportunities are narrowly circumscribed in countries which have still to equip themselves with the modern wealth-producing apparatus. This is now the major preoccupation of governments and political elites from, quite literally, China to Peru. It is also the major reason why they are so fond of describing the operation as "socialism." On political grounds there is every reason why they should be aided by the advanced industrial nations, and there are additional reasons why Americans in particular should overcome their philistine fear of the word "socialism" and try to annex it to their own, still rather timid and inadequate,

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policies of modernization. But on theoretical grounds we only cause confusion if we assimilate these authoritarian experiments to the historic aims of the socialist pioneers. These aims go back to the central purpose of putting "liberty, equality and fraternity" into concrete economic terms. They need not entail naive slogans such as "the right of the worker to the full product of his labor," which taken literally would leave society without a margin for further development; but they certainly imply that the producers themselves should decide democratically how the social product is to be divided. Stripped of verbiage, this is what the term "classless society" signifies.

IV

Are these aims utopian? If they are, there is no point in arguing the case any further. It must be stressed, however, that the answer can only be arrived at experimentally. Hitherto it has not been possible to bring together both the material conditions and the political factors that would permit a large-scale experiment to be made. Instead there has been drift towards various forms of centralized bureaucratic control, none of them satisfactory from the socialist standpoint. It is possible to treat this as proof that the whole effort was and is futile. Alternatively one may ask: what are the conditions that would permit democratic socialists to operate the kind of system in which they believe? One is then brought back to will and purpose, instead of talking about necessity, the process of history, and so forth. The difficulty lies in striking a balance. It is familiar to readers of Marx, who was the first thinker to state the problem, even if his particular solution will not satisfy everyone, not even all socialists. The tension between conscious purpose and faith in impersonal laws is common to all historical movements, but it is aggravated for socialists by the belief that the economic "laws" which conduce to the rise and dissolution of capitalism will cease to operate once a planned economy has been brought into being. Socialism indeed is meaningless if it does not signify that the automatism of economic "laws" will vanish together with the society which first discovered their operation. This perspective must be distinguished from the spontaneous rebellion of the early working class against the fact of exploitation, and in general from its reaction to the upheaval of the industrial revolution. Labor's instinctive revolt against misery and oppression certainly supplies the driving force behind the socialist movement, but it does not by itself engender the notion that common ownership of the means of production is feasible, let alone the belief that communal work will prove to be more productive, as well as

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pleasanter, than work under private ownership. These propositions were in the main worked out by thinkers reflecting upon material conditions which they themselves did not share. They may be valid or otherwise; their theoretical status depends upon the degree in which they reflect genuine economic possibilities and real tendencies in the body politic, not upon their capacity for generating moral satisfaction. This is the justification for talking of "scientific socialism," even though everyone knows that socialist economics are not morally neutral: they imply a belief that common ownership is desirable because it will reduce want and toil, eliminate class differences, and make labor less unpleasant. Unless these propositions can be shown to be true, socialism has no future.

Are they true? It is certainly not the case that common ownership by itself can be relied upon to release a great reservoir of productivity which capitalism has somehow neglected or stultified. The early socialists had some excuse for believing in the existence of such a reservoir. Their successors—whether in backward dictatorial Russia or in developed democratic Britain—have learned to their cost that the mere transfer of capital from private ownership to the state does little or nothing to release hidden wellsprings of effort. Nor is it the case that capitalism must inevitably waste such a large part of society's resources through crises and unemployment that nationalization will immediately tap a huge additional source of wealth. Such arguments, which gained a certain plausibility in the 1930's, have fallen into disuse since it was discovered that the state can intervene to maintain full employment without encroaching very seriously upon private ownership of resources. Of course this regulated capitalism is not the liberal system of the nineteenth century, but it is capitalism all the same, if that term signifies the opposite of common ownership. It is true that the mixed economy can become a genuinely planned one. There are pragmatic arguments in favor of an economy with a publicly-owned sector embracing most of the basic industries and services, but the superiority of such a system must be argued on economic grounds. Taken by itself, though, it cannot be said to embody the socialist ideal of a democratic community with common ownership, though it may facilitate the creation of small local or municipal islands of democratic socialism, probably run at a temporary loss and with generous state subsidies. Again, it is true that there is a good deal of waste of resources under present conditions (even aside from armaments), and some of it could be reduced by doing away with unproductive expenditure. But the notion that *only* under full socialism can the full potential of modern technology be

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utilized, begins to look rather romantic. May it not be more probable that socialism will enable people to put a brake upon constantly growing productivity, rather than the other way about?

Next to poverty and unsatisfied wants, class differences and class conflict present the second major theme of the original socialist protest. Indeed they are related, inasmuch as rule by a privileged class was viewed—correctly—as an aspect of society's inability to satisfy the most urgent material needs of all its members. Insistence upon this theme was among the principal contributions made by Marxism to socialist thought. It followed logically that class privileges would disappear in the measure that the productivity of labor, hence the collective wealth of society, became so great as to make real social democracy possible. This is a realistic perspective, but it does not follow that the attainment of this aim is necessarily bound up with the institution of common ownership. Conceivably it might happen, to a quite substantial extent, while accumulation was still going forward under private control. Conversely, the forcible socialization of economic resources in backward countries—the only kind of "socialist revolution" still possible in the modern world—seems likely, for reasons already suggested, to heighten the antagonism between the state and the worker, at any rate during a lengthy transition period. Even setting aside the "new class" aspect of this situation (in reality a pseudo-problem, since the real bent of such state-controlled systems is maximum investment in production, not excessive consumption by a new privileged class), there is the virtual certainty that democracy will be the first, and most lasting, casualty of the revolution. For proof one need only run through the political alphabet from Algeria via Cuba to the Soviet Union. The resulting paradox—democracy without socialism on one side of the line, socialism without democracy on the other—is perhaps most plainly visible to a spectator perched on the Berlin Wall; but no binoculars are needed to perceive the steady erosion of traditional class privileges in the most advanced Western countries, which are yet not socialist. As productivity rises while capital accumulation proceeds, a certain rather boring kind of social equality becomes a reality. Once more the edge of the socialist protest is dulled.

Lastly, there is the abolition of useless and unpleasant toil as a consequence of increased social wealth, leading in the end to the disappearance of the division between physical and intellectual labor, and therewith of the ultimate barrier between the classes: perhaps also the original one. Enslavement to the division of labor is a theme which Marx inherited from German idealism and introduced into socialist literature, where it was previously unknown. How seriously he took it

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is evident from the fact that it recurs in one of his latest writings, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Since then his more radical followers have been committed to the vision of a "classless society" which is not simply the industrial democracy of ordinary social-democratic thought. In the Marxian fashion this was treated both as an aim to be achieved, and as a process to be understood while it was happening—the assumption being that there was an inherent tendency for things to shape themselves in such a way that certain libertarian purposes could be grafted onto the movement of history. This is now beginning to look doubtful. For the English-speaking world, Marx's contemporaries among the liberals, and the Ruskin-Morris school of Christian or post-Christian socialism, set out an alternative goal: economic equality and therewith the chance for society to adopt a more harmonious and less competitive way of life. This too presupposes the abolition of poverty and the satisfaction of all "reasonable wants," and it also implies a willingness to sacrifice further wealth creation to non-economic goals. The awkward fact here is that modern capitalism seems able to do away with the grosser forms of poverty while sustaining an almost insatiable desire for more and better consumption goods. The consequent erosion of the old egalitarian and puritanical strain within socialism is now the favorite theme of British economists and sociologists on the Left or New Left. It clearly has practical as well as moral significance, for it tends to weaken the assumption that the spontaneous needs and aspirations of the working class are socialist in the sense so defined. "If the objective of the labor movement in Western countries is to obtain the highest material standard of living for the masses, as measured by what the masses subjected to the publicity and social pressures of the contemporary scene are likely to want, then there is nothing to be gained by pretending that their objective has anything in common with the traditional aims of socialism." (Professor Henry Smith, *The Economics of Socialism Reconsidered,* pp. 125-6.) Coming from the Vice-Principal of Ruskin College—an institution originally created to provide the British labor movement with theoretical guidance—this is a depressing suggestion. It presupposes of course that "socialism" is to be defined in terms that are not simply economic. But is this really open to question? It may be impractical to give an unequivocal definition of "justice" that would satisfy everyone, but it is roughly possible to stipulate the conditions that would have to be satisfied for a reasonable degree of economic equality to be approached, and for most people to do only the kind of work that they actually want to do, and no more of it than they feel like doing. Unfortunately it does not look as though

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this aim is compatible with the more immediate urge for economic growth and higher living standards. As matters stand, a choice has to be made, and under democratic conditions the majority is likely to choose material progress, even at the cost of inequality and frustration for those who are left behind. In this sense, democracy and socialism conflict, unless the meaning of socialism is reduced to economic planning and the resulting system advertised as a superior means of increasing society's wealth, while retaining a large margin of inequality and consequent "injustice."

In practice it is this latter tendency which imposes itself, for the simple reason that it corresponds to what the electorate of an industrial country actually wants, or at any rate prefers to the stationary condition of life which seems the price to be paid for genuine equality. Once socialists are committed to "planning for growth," they are likewise committed to a set of priorities which takes small account of traditional goals. It can of course be argued that these goals need only be deferred until society has become rich enough to dispense with the constant chase after higher productivity. But even in the most advanced countries this looks like a rather distant aim. Alternatively it may be argued that people will get tired of the strain imposed by the constant revolutionizing of the productive apparatus, and will democratically opt for greater stability, even at the cost of renouncing some of the fruits of technical progress. There have been socialists who regarded this as both possible and desirable. The late Aneurin Bevan once said to the writer: "If the only choice were between capitalism and the Middle Ages, I'd go back to the Middle Ages straightaway." (He added characteristically: "What's all this talk about making British industry more efficient? It's far too efficient as it is!") Such sentiments are respectable, but have little chance of being applied in practice, least of all in a society which has already tasted the forbidden fruits of modern technology. If anything is certain it is that the electorate, and notably the working class, wants material progress, even at the cost of some discomfort and inequality. It will not put up with parties—conservative or socialist—which seem to have other things more prominently in the forefront of their minds. As for the technical intelligentsia, the only really important new stratum to emerge since the 1930's, it is quite willing to support socialist—or for that matter authoritarian—parties, on condition that they sound "modern"; and "modernity" to this group means primarily one thing: stress on the maximum rate of technical advance compatible with "order." For the "new class" wants progress to be both rapid and orderly. It is bored with rhetoric and has no taste for barricades. Its

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heroes are scientists, technologists, organizers, and political leaders who "get things done." It is quite capable of preferring even an autocrat like de Gaulle, for all his traditional style, to left-wingers who talk the antiquated language of popular rebellion or parliamentary combination. It is open to socialist ideas, but wants them to be "practical." It is also fairly confident of its ability to manage the new order of things, under whatever label. So far most socialist parties have not done very well in attracting the support of this stratum, while the Communists have succeeded only in a few backward countries. The issue is still open. It is clearly going to be the key problem of the coming decade. If the traditional socialist movements in Western society do not want to be left behind, they will have to modernize themselves sufficiently to attract the new stratum. The alternative is to stay content with the role of a permanent "workers' opposition" against the directing class of the new society: hardly an attractive role to choose for anyone but born sectarians.

But will this modernization leave much of the traditional socialist heritage intact? Economic planning by itself clearly is indeterminate in respect of certain goals that the socialist pioneers regarded as crucially important: they may or may not be secured. Others seem to be utopian, notably the attainment of complete equality and the consequent renunciation of further technical and economic progress (which always involves priorities and inequalities). Still others are attainable only in certain rather privileged parts of the globe. It may be as well to recognize that in the backward countries sheer material pressure will for the most part militate against the degree of freedom and equality already available to the inhabitants of Western Europe and North America. At the other end of the scale a few specially favored countries —rich enough to afford the experiment, and unimportant enough to be left out of the global power struggle—may with luck register the next advance in making liberty and equality a reality for most of their citizens. If they are willing to content themselves with a modest rise in living standards, they may not even have to be excessively rich; they will, however, have to display considerable social discipline and some resistance to the constant pressure for keeping up with the technological Joneses. If they are fortunate they may achieve some kind of internal balance at a material level high enough to take care of all reasonable needs, while yielding moon rockets and other cosmic extravagances to the great. They may even exert a civilizing influence on societies obsessed with the urge to provide every household with three cars and three sets of color television. Beyond this modest goal one hardly sees what socialists in the Western world can currently expect to achieve.

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"Soviet Art Must Be Beautiful"

A CHRONICLE OF THE CHILL

Déjà vu? At the Manezh art exhibition on December 1, 1962, Khrushchev addressed the "formalist painters" in very informal terms:

> Judging by these experiments, I am entitled to think that you are pederasts and for that you can get ten years. You've gone out of your minds, and now you want to deflect us from the proper course. No, you won't get away with it . . . Gentlemen, we are declaring war on you.

The campaign against abstract art which followed was depressingly familiar. Evidently it was merely a prelude to a more extensive crackdown, the most serious since Zhdanov's time. One of its immediate aims was to arrest the mounting "new wave" in Soviet arts and literature, the most promising such development since the Twenties.

The campaign gathered momentum as *Pravda* published a series of customary obeisances and letters to Khrushchev which hailed his condemnation of the "donkey's tail paintings." The engineers of the Mitishinski machine-tool factory gravely declared that "art must be beautiful." The old Stalinist court painters uttered triumphant cries. The artists who at first were bold enough to answer Khrushchev back now fell silent, and some of them wrote half-hearted recantations. It was clear that the literary intelligentsia would be next on the agenda. Some of its represenatives, including Ehrenburg and Simonov, appealed in a collective letter to Khrushchev "to halt a return in the arts to the methods used in the past which are repugnant to the whole spirit of our times." They added:

> Unless a variety of artistic trends can coexist, art is doomed. We now see how your remarks at the exhibition are beginning to be interpreted by the artists who alone flourished under Stalin and who did not allow artists of other trends to work or even to live.

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Soon after, four hundred writers and artists were facing Khrushchev and his retinue at a specially arranged meeting. The offending paintings and sculptures were brought in, like "people's exhibits," and their "ugliness" exposed. The Party's ideological spokesman, Leonid Ilichev, assailed such art as "alien" and emphasized that in this, as in other spheres, there cannot be any "ideological coexistence." The condemnation of "abstract art" led at once to a discussion of other sensitive areas. Literature was the prime target. Defensive arguments were met by Khrushchev with such proverbs as "Only a grave can correct a hunchback." All those who had dealt with unacceptable subjects, like anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, were denounced for political errors. The new thirteenth symphony of Shostakovich was censured for its theme, based on Evtushenko's anti-anti-Semitic poem, *Babi Yar*. It was not telecast as planned and no reviews of it appeared in the press; only the journal *Soviet Culture* alluded to it, saying that "under the cover of the struggle against the personality cult, some of our creative artists have started rummaging around in the garbage pits in our backyard."

It may seem puzzling that a little more than a month after the Cuban crisis, Khrushchev found time to engage in an "ideological" debate over misguided missiles in art and literature. But political priorities in ideocratic states are in fact less inscrutable than the ways of Providence. In Soviet history any sort of turmoil in literary life is followed by the tightening of controls to prevent the expression of political attitudes in symbolic form. This was the case in 1957, when the cry for "sincerity in literature" was stifled. Khrushchev threatened then to shoot the writers who showed too independent an attitude. ("And my hand would not tremble . . .") After 1959, a more permissive atmosphere gradually prevailed and the Twenty-second Party Congress was a signal for another period of ferment.

The post-Stalin generation of writers and artists at last began to produce works of interest, and sometimes of genuine merit. The poetry of Voznesensky, Evtushenko, and Akhmadulina became known not only by their writings, but also by their recitation at poetry readings. Such prose writers as Kazakov and Aksyonov also began to reach wide audiences. The "new wave" invaded not only literature and art, but also cinema and the theatre. Some established older writers like Paustovsky, Katayev, and Tvardovsky offered their encouragement and protection. Hitherto prohibited subjects began to find their way into print, culminating in the publication—with Khrushchev's own permission—of the literary sensation of 1962, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One*

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Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. It was uniformly praised by all the critics, even by that eternal informer, Ermilov (whose record includes the denunciations of Mayakovsky). Later, Khrushchev himself disclosed that "manuscripts about life in prisons, camps, and places of deportation are now flooding journals and publishing houses."

The mood of the artistic and literary intelligentsia in 1962 can perhaps best be gauged from Ilichev's complaint that "in certain intellectual milieux it is considered unseemly and unfashionable to defend correct Party positions." To do so was to risk being accused of "narrow-mindedness, backwardness, Stalinism, etc." Things had apparently gone so far that Stalinist critics like Ermilov and Elsberg had come under fire at writers' meetings for denouncing their colleagues during the Yezhov purge. According to the same reports, Elsberg was expelled from the Writers' Union after Ehrenburg accused him of being a party to the destruction of the manuscripts of Isaac Babel at the time of Babel's arrest. Such an incident, of course, raised by implication the issue of the members of the Stalinist generation's personal responsibility for the old tyrant's rule of terror.

The line had to be drawn; Ehrenburg, whose reputation is scarcely that of Caesar's wife, was chosen as a suitable target. He was attacked for his alleged role in the Stalinist purges by Galina Serebryakova at the December meeting with Khrushchev. (Serebryakova spent twenty years in prisons and camps and was rehabilitated in 1956; her two ex-husbands, Sekelnikov and Serebryakov, were victims of the Moscow Trials and are still unrehabilitated.) Evidently, she was used to confuse the issues and to defend the Stalinist generation. Her charges against Ehrenburg created a fearful sensation, particularly since they were based on the testimony of Stalin's private secretary, Alexander Peskrebyshev. The invocation of such a witness could hardly have been just an excess of zeal, as was her later gratuitous statement that "one can scarcely find a prisoner who has not met honest Soviet men in the organs of security or among the guards (of the prison camps)."

Serebryakova's allegations against Ehrenburg represented the preliminaries in what was to become a fully orchestrated attack during the following weeks. Ehrenburg, it appeared, had touched upon the rawest nerve of the regime's sensibilities. In the chapter of his memoirs dealing with the purges of the Thirties, he asserted that he, (and by implication, others) was aware that innocent people were being persecuted; there was nothing to do, he said, but keep silent, teeth clenched. Such an assertion, if generally applied, strikes at the very legitimacy of Khrushchev's rule; if Khrushchev himself was aware of the in-

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nocence of Stalin's victims, then the matter of his own responsibility as a high Party official at the time of Yezhov's purges, and later, is brought into the open. But, like Nazi accomplices after Hitler's defeat, the Stalinists claim ignorance of what was going on during Stalin's reign.

The next salvoes against Ehrenburg were delivered by Ermilov, who wrote in *Izvestiya*: "Evidently, I. Ehrenburg had a great advantage over the overwhelming majority of Soviet people who in those years had no doubts about the propriety of the actions of 'the people in command.'" Ermilov added that in specific cases individuals had "fought and (unlike Ehrenburg) fought not in silence." Ehrenburg replied in a letter to *Izvestiya* that he "was not present at a single meeting at which people took the floor to protest the arbitrary persecution of comrades whose innocence they never doubted," nor did he ever read a single article in the press against it. But Ermilov's rejoinder, endorsed by the editors of *Izvestiya,* was emphatically to the point:

> How are the Soviet people who lived, worked, and fought in the time Ehrenburg is telling us about now made to look in the eyes of youth? After all, according to both his memoirs and his letter, it turns out that everybody, or at least the majority of people, at that time [of the purges] already knew that evil was being done in the name of Stalin, that the mass repressions were unjustified—knew and were silent. This represents an insult to a whole generation of Soviet people in an effort to give oneself a clean bill of health.

More attacks on Ehrenburg in the press followed. The climax came at the next meeting with the intellectuals in the Kremlin, on March 8th. The speeches of Khrushchev and Ilichev were certainly not calculated to give Ehrenburg "a clean bill of health"; he was to be exposed as a source of infection. And Ehrenburg was hardly in a position to quote Herzen: "You are not the doctors, you are the disease." Ilichev ironically recollected Ehrenburg's behaviour in Stalin's time: "Well, Ilya Grigoryevich, you did not keep silent then. On the contrary you were eulogizing—eulogizing to the limit of your journalistic talent." And quoting Ehrenburg's panegyrics to Stalin, Ilichev added:

> We were all talking and writing like this then, without hypocrisy. We believed, and hence wrote in such a way. It appears that you did not believe, but you wrote like this all the same. These are two different stands.

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In the major speech that followed, Khrushchev assured his audience that he wept "sincere tears" at Stalin's funeral, that he was unaware until then that "absolutely innocent people were being arrested, and learned about it only afterwards." Ehrenburg, who "was not persecuted or subject to restrictions at the time," wrote about the purges "from afar, as if from a foreign country." He was an outsider observing events from the sidelines. An insider like Khrushchev evidently had a better view of the period of the personality cult: "I can tell from my own experience as a participant in the events of those years, which are sometimes presented in gloomy colors and dull shades, that those years were bright, happy years . . ."

It would be wrong to assume that straining the credulity of listeners is the chief function of Khrushchev's speeches. The practical purpose of his March performance was to put an end to a potentially dangerous development: an intellectual ferment which might undermine poltical authority. As in 1956, after the Hungarian revolution, it required a partial rehabilitation of Stalin to justify Khrushchev's own past. This time, however, the ideological corruption of Soviet youth has also become a major concern.

Particularly revealing in this respect was Khrushchev's reference to a scene in the film *Ilyich Gate*, made by two young film directors, Shpalikov and Khutzyev, which has not been released. One of the heroes of the film has a vision of the ghost of his father (killed in the war) and asks him what to do with his life. "How old are you?" asks the father. "Twenty-three," replies the son. "I am twenty-one," says the ghost and disappears.

This symbolic assertion of independence by the post-Stalin generation reaching maturity greatly enraged Khrushchev:

> Can one imagine that a father would not reply to the son's question and would not help him with advice on how to find the right way in life? . . . Do you want to set the youth against the old generation, embroil them with each other, carry discord into the friendly Soviet family, which unites young and old in the common struggle for communism?

He was incensed by the writer Victor Nekrasov's praise of the film; Nekrasov not only stated that "the Stalin period was a real tragedy for us all" and that Soviet writers should create "a truly tragic work," but also expressed light-hearted relief that the directors of the film had not spoiled it by "dragging into it, by his grey whiskers, some old worker who understands everything and has a ready-made explanation for everything." To write in such "lordly, scornful terms" about an old

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worker is, according to Khrushchev, entirely inadmissible for a Soviet writer.

Age (and class) must be respected. There is a personal note in this remark, as well as synthetic indignation. The ex-miner from Kalinovka, with his *Rabfak* (workers' faculty) background, resents the quest for sophistication. The Stalinist bureaucrats promoted from the bench to positions of power are afraid of losing their grip over the better educated members of the young generation. In November, 1956, Khrushchev threatened to relegate the rebellious Moscow students to factory work, and his 1958 educational reform made it a condition of admission to the university. Now, having devoted a large part of his March speech to the transgressions of the young against the prerogatives of the old, Khrushchev proclaimed that the problem did not exist: "There is no conflict of generations in Soviet society. There is no 'fathers-and-sons' problem in the old sense. It has been invented by the makers of the film and artificially inflated not for the best of intentions."

Khrushchev reserved his choicest language for the painters and writers. Some artists, he said, "judge reality only by the smells coming from toilets." The work of Russia's most distinguished young sculptor, Ernst Neizvestny, was described as a "nauseating concoction." What sort of artistic achievement deserves Khrushchev's approval? Here, he provides us with a most illuminating catalogue of his personal tastes in all the arts.

In poetry, he recalls nostalgically the agitational rhymes of Demyan Bedny, who during the Civil War showed his "penetration of the soul of the toiling peasant" in such gems as "How My Mother Saw Me Off On My Way."

In sculpture, he is enraptured by the bust of Karl Marx in Moscow and the monument to Soviet soldiers in Berlin—examples of "genuine works of art which inspire strong and noble sentiments."

In painting, he admires the canvases of Laktynov, which are "full of joy and summon one to work."

In music, he singles out the cavalry songs of Budenny's army, the International, and a number called "Do The Russians Want War?" Summing up, the chief of state calls for "inspiring music which summons people to military feats."

An example for the young writers to follow was provided in the person of Nikolai Gribachev, that "poet-warrior who has a sharp eye and never misses when striking at our ideological enemies." It will be recalled that the self-same Gribachev played a prominent role during the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign under Stalin, denouncing Jewish

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writers and critics. Evtushenko's *Babi Yar* was condemned: "There is no Jewish problem in our country." He demanded not only that the young should mend their ways, but also that they should prostrate themselves through the ritual of recantation: "Don't be ashamed, comrade Evtushenko, to admit your mistakes."

It took the Party some time to extract such recantations as followed. Although their symbolic significance—submission to the Party's will—was still the same as in Stalin's time, their form was different. They were couched in more impersonal terms and were less self-abasing, particularly among the young.

Members of the older generation were the first to capitulate: Simonov, Aseev, Shostakovich, etc. Their reflexes are better conditioned. The young "modernists" were slower to yield, the earliest among them being the painter Vasnetsov and the sculptor Neizvestny. Also, like Eisenstein after the onslaught on the second part of "Ivan the Terrible" (now released), the directors of "Ilyich Gate" promised to remake their film "in order to overcome its errors and to make it helpful and useful to the Soviet audience." The recantation of the young poet, Robert Rozhdestvensky, is so lyrical that it sounds as if he were talking through his hat: "We live in an amazingly poetic age, in an amazingly poetic country. The Communist Party which leads our country is the most poetic party in the world."

At the writers' meetings, organized after Khrushchev's speech, some intellectuals still had the courage to maintain their previous positions. The critic Borshchagovsky defended Ehrenburg; the Leningrad theatre director Akimov defended his production of the satirical play, "The Dragon"; and the literary historian Timofeev charged the diehards with "trying to revive the tendencies of the worst period of the personality cult of Stalin."

The diehards, however, were triumphant. One of the most prominent among them, the editor of *Oktyabr*, Vsevolod Kochetov, proclaimed that "the period of debates is over." At the plenary session of the presidium of the Writers' Union, held at the end of March to draw the organizational conclusions from Khrushchev's speech and to bring the remaining recalcitrants to heel, almost all the speakers were jubilant "conservatives." Even the Italian Communist paper, *l'Unita*, was critical:

> Sofronov, Markov, Prokofiev, Chakovsky, Mikhailov, Smirnov, to mention only a few of the better known speakers during these three days, had one aim and one aim only: to put on the bench of the accused the young generation of writers and their supporters, who have been protecting them along the difficult road they have been traveling these last years.

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L'Unita quoted the playwright Sofronov as saying that "the Writers' Union is not just Voznesensky and Evtushenko, but an organization of hundreds of writers who are and will be loyal to the Soviet regime." *L'Unita* comments that this declaration "not only contains a grave insinuation, but also does not explain why the plenary session of the Union was devoted almost exclusively to a discussion of these two young people."

The assaults on Evtushenko resulted in a half-hearted apology. He admitted his "heavy guilt," realized his mistakes, and promised to try to correct them in his future work. This, however, was not satisfactory. On the next day, *Pravda* declared that "Evtushenko did not recognize the roots of his mistakes."

Veznesensky said that he "will never forget the hard and severe words of Nikita Sergeevich." Other writers under fire—Ehrenburg, Nekrasov, Aksyonov, Akhmadulina—did not take part in the proceedings of the plenum and remained silent. Writers of far less talent used the occasion to achieve success by political zealotry. The speech of the young writer Vladimir Firsev was particularly vicious:

> I think that no small share of guilt for the behaviour of Evtushenko belongs to those people who for a couple of years contributed to the unmerited praise of five or six writers. What compliments were not showered upon Evtushenko, Akhmadulina, Aksyonov! . . . But have we re-educated comrades Aksyonov, Evtushenko, Veznesensky by continuously letting them go on foreign trips, by putting them on editorial boards, and by publishing their works in enormous editions? It is now clear that we have not. It is they who have been 'educating' readers during that time, and often they have educated them in such a way that it will take us a lot of work to liquidate the consequences of their educational efforts.

The speech of that old Stalinist war-horse, Alexander Kerneychuk, carried a barely concealed threat:

> Voznesensky, Evtushenko and other young people like them do not understand where they are being pushed by forces hostile to our state and our people. They do not see this and they do not realize how clever are the foreign "fishermen of souls." If the Party had not stopped them, who knows how far they might have gone? We might have had to talk to them in quite a different tone.

In the organizational sphere the "conservatives" won. Since Khrushchev's visit to the art exhibition, liberal writers and artists have been

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replaced on the boards of literary journals and organizations. Their only remaining bastion, the magazine *Novy Mir*, is hardly likely to continue its previous editorial policy, even though its editor, Alexander Tvardovsky, has not yet been replaced by Ermilov, as a Moscow rumor, apparently reflecting writers' fears, indicated.

The new literary policy will, of course, be established in book publishing. One of the speakers at the plenum appealed to the publishing houses "not to waste mountains of paper" on the works of such poets as Evtushenko, who are not appreciated by the people (curiously enough, the speaker himself mentioned in the same speech that the last collection of poems by Evtushenko, *Tenderness*, in an edition of 100,000 copies, disappeared from the bookshops in a few weeks). He also anticipated "the outcry by our enemies which will follow the meetings of the leaders of the Party and government with artists and writers." Konstantin Fedin, the First Secretary of the Union, seemed more concerned about the effect of all this "on our friends abroad." But anxious as he might have been, he pretended that there was no cause for alarm:

> There are all kinds of "Russian specialists" and "Soviet experts" in the West whose activity helps to spread, from decade to decade, the myth that socialism suppresses the individuality of artists. . . . We are pleased that the importance of artistic individuality has been confirmed by Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev in the concluding part of his speech.

Fedin went through the wringer himself as a young writer when he was attacked by the "proletarian" litterateurs from RAPP in the Twenties. After the fathers, it is now the sons' turn to face the cycle of submission, recantation, loss of dignity, and erosion of artistic integrity. Their decisions are not easy. Soviet writers who published their work abroad (Alexander Esenin-Volpin, Mikhail Naritza, Valeriy-Tarsis) were declared insane and put into asylums. But even though a more general application of this method of punishment may be impractical, the Party can still exercise enough pressure to make the life of the intransigent writers extremely difficult. The path of Pasternak is not for everybody.

The chapter which opened on December 1, 1962, is to close on May 28, 1963, when the Central Committee of the Party will meet to make the final arrangements about the tightening of controls in all fields of cultural activity. The separate unions of writers, artists, and musicians will be amalgamated and the new, unified organization will be closely supervised by the Party hacks.

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After another dialectical twist, the Party line in literature and arts will change again, but in the meantime another generation of writers may be broken by the present "neo-Zhdanovist" assault.

Not long ago Alexander Tvardovsky said: "In art and in literature, as in love, one can lie only for a time—sooner or later comes the time to tell the truth." Clearly, that time has been indefinitely postponed.

Leopold Labedz

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BOOKS

BEYOND THE FRINGE

NAKED LUNCH. By William S. Burroughs. Grove Press. $6.00.

Lo, Lord, thou rideth!
Lord, Lord, thy swifting heart!
Nought stayeth, nought now bideth
But's smithereened apart!
—Hart Crane

Mary McCarthy is quite right* in comparing Burroughs' images to a moving picture. For one can begin to read Burroughs' book at any point, the middle, the beginning, or the end. But what she says is misleading if understood to imply that the book has real continuity, as most films have. One can begin to read anywhere in *Naked Lunch* insofar as any part or section of the book is anywhere in the book. I think, too, that Miss McCarthy might have specified the *kind* of movie *Naked Lunch* suggests: it is rather like those pornographic films that give dispirited people a dull pleasure. It is also like another kind of film: the documentaries, shown after the war, of Nazi concentration camp atrocities. Combine the two kinds of film in your imagination and you will have some notion of what is peculiar to Mr. Burroughs' work. His scenes of linked, unlovely bodies are scenes of bodies bitten, beaten, and mangled, bodies in the process of destroying other bodies and of being destroyed by them, with sex, of some horrible form, going on all the while. Now let me say right here that I find pornographic films without interest. And I could never bear the newsreel films of concentration camp horrors. How can anyone enjoy, I wonder, the dullness—amalgamated with horror—in Mr. Burroughs' book?

* See "Dejeuner sur l'Herbe," Miss McCarthy's piece on *Naked Lunch* in *The New York Review of Books.*

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I think I understand why Norman Mailer likes this sort of thing. But I do not understand his way of formulating his liking. For there is neither "beauty" nor "exquisiteness" in *Naked Lunch,* as he attests. And when Robert Lowell calls the book ". . . completely powerful and serious . . . as good as anything in prose or poetry written by a 'beat' writer . . ." his is fundamentally an aesthetic judgment, a judgment of the book in comparison with other books. For Lowell has not at all faced up to the question of why anyone should want to read, let alone praise, *Naked Lunch.* Miss McCarthy, more aware that the book is problematic, tries to justify it as humorous: ". . . what saves *Naked Lunch* is . . . humor." And she gives some instances of Burroughs' humor, not a single one even vaguely funny to this reader. Miss McCarthy should know better, having far more humor herself.

Should people read *Naked Lunch* to be saddened by it? But there is little sadness in the work, just as there is no humor. Such sadness as I felt came to me not in the course of reading, but afterward, when I reflected on why the book was written, on why it has become part of literature. What need could such a work satisfy? It must have satisfied some need to have achieved its present vogue.

Very probably there is a metaphysical need in many people which cannot nowadays be satisfied by the "high" experiences of ethical decision, speculative wonder, communion with nature or with others; such "high" experiences are not now capable of putting people in touch. And evidently there is a persisting need to be in touch with something—no matter what—that can be felt as ultimately real, decisively so.

A quarter of a century ago in Paris, the philosopher Jean Wahl gave a lecture, now famous, in which he made the point that transcendence—the act of going beyond appearances—may move upward or downward: one may transcend upward toward God, or clear values, or downward toward obscure values, or the "dark gods" of whom Lawrence wrote. And Wahl, in making his point, coined two new words: trans-ascendence and trans-descendence. I remember his saying to me of the second word: "Isn't it beautiful?" But what the word describes is most eminently not beautiful, and not exquisite either, to refer once again to Mailer's two adjectives for Burroughs' effort. For to trans-descend means to get to the real at some point where everything normally valid in experience is forgotten or discarded, notably the beautiful. The goal is to arrive at the conviction that one has touched on something incorrigibly, incontrovertibly extreme, no matter how horrid, no matter how painful, no matter how far outside any moral or aesthetic discrimination. The main thing is utterness: being

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as utterness. And this utterness, for some reason or other, people hope to experience nowadays in nausea, in dread, in violence, in impotence, or in "total need"—Burroughs' phrase for the situation of the drug addict.

One wonders: if there is a metaphysical impulse, a real need for Being, why is this need not satisfied today in so-called higher experiences? Modern skepticism, no doubt, has destroyed the prestige of God, moral decision, speculative wonder, love or rapture. But why has it not destroyed the metaphysical prestige of crime or drug addiction? There is an interesting saying by a somewhat criminal-minded Sabbatian Cabbalist of the eighteenth century: "When the brave knights are beaten and the wise men want to retreat, a know-nothing will sneak in through a sewer and take the castle by stealth . . ."

Our skepticism is strong when it comes to trans-ascendence, weak when it comes to trans-descendence.

Now it is foolish, I think, to justify *Naked Lunch* as literature. Its descriptions of hallucinatory states under drug addiction are neither beautiful nor exquisite nor brilliant nor informative. I even wonder whether they are true. According to the author himself, the junkie has no sense of sex or sense of shame or interest in his own sexual organs: "It is doubtful if shame can exist in the absence of sexual libido. . . . The junkie's shame disappears with his non-sexual sociability which is also dependent on libido. . . . The addict regards his body impersonally as an instrument to absorb the medium in which he lives, evaluates his tissue with the cold hands of a horse trader." *Naked Lunch* supposedly describes states of consciousness where anything like sex, according to the author himself, could not even be dimly glimpsed. Yet the hallucinations described all involve sex, and the author's prose is constantly sexualized. Is this due to literary influences? The influence of Henry Miller, or perhaps of Lautréaumont? But the question remains: why the insistence on sex, however horrible, if a true description of the junkie's state of mind would have to leave out sex altogether?

Apparently Mr. Burroughs' book is no more in the service of the true than it is in the service of the beautiful. In fact, it has only a tiny bit of literary merit. And yet it does satisfy something in the reader. Something not exactly literary, but something from which literature cannot completely separate itself: the need for utterness, utterness in some form, however degraded, painful, spasmodic, or obscene, utterness as a sign, at least, of something more real than the things we are normally in contact with. In an age of crisis literature will trans-ascend or trans-descend, one or the other. That *Naked Lunch* trans-descends is its single claim to be literature.

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Trans-descending has recently become a veritable cult: utterness, and the search for it, have served to justify violence in sex, in morals, in extremist politics (Black Muslim or Castroite), and in art. Did not André Breton prophesy during the last war: "Beauty will be convulsive, or not be"? In a much admired play by Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story,* a schizophrenic bum is pitted, with the author's evident support, against a domesticated and conformist intellectual. At the climax of the play the protagonist forces the trivial character he has been denouncing to impale him on a knife. The bum dies: a sacrifice to utterness. Now the values asserted in this work are much the same as those used by Norman Mailer in his essay "The White Negro" to justify hipsters and psychopaths. I should note, too, that Jean Genet first attracted attention to himself in Paris as a person with serious aims by announcing a criminal one: the aim was to kill a young man beautiful enough to be worthy of being killed by Genet. And very recently James Baldwin excited the interest of sophisticated people in this country by threatening the whole white population with black violence. In his *New Yorker* article, "From a Region in My Mind," Baldwin alternately beseeched and bullied white Americans as follows: Help us save you—from us! The electric effect of his article, which did not contain a single clear political idea and was full of abusive threats—of a racist sort, by the way—can be explained only by its extremism, for extremism has now become very modish. Nor is it hard to understand why. We live in a world where trivia have become preponderant; moreover, to complicate matters, ahead of our present-day trivia, in the political future, lies possible catastrophe. Naturally, most of those inclined to support any escape from triviality, are themselves quite incapable of being untrivial, except vicariously. These are the fellow travelers of the cult of utterness and they make up a good part of the audience for Mailer's and Baldwin's books, for Genet's novels and plays, and for William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch.*

I feel sorry for William Burroughs insofar as he had to write his book, but I feel sorry, too, for literature, insofar as it is now in some sense dependent on and cannot be altogether dissociated from an effort such as his. For clearly, literature cannot justify itself solely as literature; it is not independent of life, it needs to be needed for some other purpose than a purely literary one. For what purpose? In this era, the purpose seems to be, perhaps must be, the satisfaction of a metaphysical need not satisfied elsewhere. In which case, however lacking in literary merit *Naked Lunch,* it is going to be considered and judged—and admired—as literature.

Lionel Abel

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IN THE POWERS COUNTRY

MORTE D'URBAN. By J. F. Powers. Doubleday. $4.50.

J. F. Powers has long enjoyed an inconspicuous fame as the author of two excellent volumes of short stories, *The Prince of Darkness* and *The Presence of Grace*. These volumes, together with his recently published novel, *Morte d'Urban,* make up Powers' entire work. The outcome of twenty years of writing, the work is obviously not extensive but it is very good. And *Morte d'Urban,* a comic novel of great charm and point, casts its glow back over the short stories, of which it seems the inevitable extension.

Powers' work is all the more interesting because its prime subject is one that has been little exploited by good writers and that would seem, in fact, to hold little promise for them. His subject is the contradictions that beset Catholicism, in practice if not in theory, because of its claim to an earthly as well as a divine mission and authority. Powers is, however, a very down to earth, very American, Catholic. In his work, the contradictions are expressed, not in any of those flagrant dramas of sin and redemption which form the staples of Christian romance, but in the simple spectacle of priests going about the ordinary business of their professions. From this spectacle, however, he evokes a mingling of severity and raillery which is not simple. It seems to have confused many of the reviewers of *Morte d'Urban,* even one so intelligent as Stanley Edgar Hyman, who wrote: "It is very funny when Father Urban . . . is wet on by a hamster but it is not the Dark Night of the Soul." Definitely not, and J. F. Powers is not Graham Greene, with whom Mr. Hyman rather unfortunately compared him. In the soul, as we glimpse it in Powers' stories, it is not always three o'clock in the morning; it practically never is. By stating his objections to *Morte d'Urban,* however, Mr. Hyman actually defined the grounds of Powers' special excellence. In his own way he is a thorough realist, even a regionalist. His explorations into novelistic reality are confined to a locale that is small enough and distinct enough to be knowable in terms of what he wants to know about it. Improbably, for a writer of his faith, his locale is traditionally Lutheran Minnesota. The advantage to him of this setting, however, is just that it intensifies the essential contradictions. His fictive Minnesota, a country of interminable flats, vague lakes and woodlands, and slightly hostile natives, is very far from Rome (traditional Rome) and centuries away from St. John of the Cross. The distance lends a certain unreality to Church

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Latin, black habits, medieval vows, and dogmatic assumptions; and from this unreality arises some of the severity and much of the hilarity of the whole spectacle of priestly endeavor in Powers' domain. Yet neither the vague unrealities nor the all too raw realities of his Minnesota keep Powers from depicting it with restrained affection: the heart has, apparently, its regions. Nor are his ecclesiastics and their lay followers submitted to the kind of doctrinaire scrutiny which might see them as all of a piece. Powers excels at portraying specimens of "the terrible thing a false vocation can be"—irate beer-swilling Fathers whose inner wastelands make a desolation all around them. But there is somewhere, portrayed with the same skill, some austerely dedicated Bishop to judge the falsifiers. And there is the old Franciscan, Father Didymus, of "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does," who seems to attain authentic holiness, if only when he is at the point of death.

Death, however, is a rare thing in Powers' world, and so is any theological obsession with mortality. His characters, both lay and ecclesiastic, are remarkable for their stubborn grasp on life, their fierce little wills, their flat assertive speech, their aggressive actions. They make vivid characters for fiction but have too much character for the good of their souls. And the mortuary solution is withheld from them as, possibly, too easy.

Powers' is a world of the living all too living, and only in such a world can the ethical consideration bear much weight. For the purposes of fiction, he effects a divorce between faith and morals. The question is not whether faith, in the measure his characters have it, makes them greatly better or greatly worse than those outside the fold. The question is whether those inside the fold can sustain the moral life at the level of average good will, self-respect and taste. If this approach is necessary to Powers as a moral realist, it is also congenial to him as a story teller; and his love of narration in all shapes, sizes and degrees of seriousness is obvious. Stories within stories, ranging from rectory-table anecdotes through biblical parables to scraps of radio serials caught from the airwaves, thicken the fictional atmosphere. Each sentence tends to be an event; yet every event, like every firm but fluent sentence, is an open door into the next half-expected, half-shocking encounter. Thus does J. F. Powers coax stories out of the shabby rectories of his not altogether mythical Minnesota.

Morte d'Urban is his supreme fiction so far and its hero, Father Urban, is his largest and gayest embodiment of the old contradiction. "You may be right," is Father Urban's slogan, his favorite formula of moral accomodation. Another Sir Lancelot, brave, beautiful and

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gracious, he has a weakness for his worldly Guinivere, which in Father Urban's case is several aggressive laymen headed by an especially alluring and awful Chicago tycoon. (I suspect, however, that the Malory echoes are meant to provide only grace notes to the comic tune of the novel: isn't just about every modern fictional hero required to establish an "ironic" relation with some figure out of mythology?) Actually, Father Urban's too accommodating spirit springs from a certain quality of radiant good will about him, a quality which, far from being evil in itself, is ideally human, and peculiarly "American." If the chances of an impoverished childhood had not made a priest of him, Father Urban would be imaginable as a vastly superior Babbitt, a Gatsby whose romance with life was better rewarded, an Eisenhower whose golf, like his English, is more expert. Even as a priest Father Urban keeps his radiance until the temptations of Guinevere combine with the envy of his fellow ecclesiastics to bring out the contradiction. Then, to be sure, he gets his come-uppance, in a crescendo of "ordeals" or "trials" as touching as they are ludicrous. Yet, as a reviewer in *The Commonweal* pointed out, these culminate, not in the actual "morte" of the hero but in the demise, so to speak, of his "character," an event which makes possible, though it doesn't guarantee, his redemption.

Meanwhile Father Urban, though wholly without a spiritual vocation, has a healthy respect for the priesthood considered as a *profession*. As such his role is very dear to him, and he plays it throughout with charm and tact. It is true that his performance during the "ordeals" or "trials" is not in its moral essence superior to that of any self-respecting man belonging to a respected profession. Such a man could perhaps even be trusted to resist, as Father Urban does, the drunken provocations of the woman who, in very ominous circumstances, throws off her clothes and invites him to join her in a midnight swim. For the question, again, is one of average standards of decency. Yet few men could hope to come through it all with the fine masculine *élan* that Father Urban shows and that makes him such a marvellous literary creation. His fellow priests avoid such scrapes, not because they have the grace of God in them, but because they are merely less enterprising or more prudent than he.

Father Urban is the central figure in what is, if such categories apply here, a comedy with strong satirical overtones. The point is distinctly made that, according to *Time* magazine, the Catholic Church is second only to Standard Oil among American corporate enterprises. And the satire shows, among others things, to what an extent *Time's* claim is literally true. The satire shows the earthly church in its guise

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as an immense if rather antiquated corporate enterprise, its priests simply job-holders, its upper hierarchy an arbitrary and oppressive bureaucracy. Father Urban's troubles begin when, all too successful as a churchly go-getter in Chicago, he is banished by his jealous Father Provincial to a decrepit mansion on the Minnesota plains which his decrepit order has acquired by gift and which it hopes to convert into a prosperous home for retreatants. Here Father Urban is obliged to labor as a common workman under the command of obscure Father Wilfrid, an excruciatingly comic figure of militant mediocrity, the stubbornest of all Powers' stubborn men of ill will. And here, too, *Morte d'Urban* begins clearly to show its hand—or both its hands—and to take on the character of an ecclesiastical satire which is also a satire of American culture. The forlorn circle of clerics at work on the retreat are, from another point of view, just a bunch of fellows on their uppers trying to patch up an old hotel into a paying proposition, buying their supplies from a discount house, getting out cheap brochures, and arousing the hostility of the natives. And so on, throughout the main body of the narrative—which has been criticized as "episodic" but which is just lucid and well-timed far beyond the average. Successively, Father Urban is juxtaposed to many well-known features of the American cultural scene. One by one, the golf match, the drag race, the McCarthyite journal, the wild party, the dreary lake-side cottage, the dreary lunchroom meal, the T.V. set, the electrified crèche, insinuate themselves into his destiny. The general effect is, very roughly, that of a movie made altogether out of double exposures. Sustained by Powers' gift for discreetly daring invention, the effect is satire at its most amusing and deadly. Gazing down from a church on a new housing development "whose windows, yards and rooftops were all lit up for Christmas," an elegant Monsignor mutters: "The fires of hell, and in the summertime, with all those barbecue pits going, it smells like Afghanistan." The Church, caught in its contradictions, is not far from suggesting the same fires and smells, even though the finely managed transition to a more sober conclusion shows, I suppose, the author's essential piety, his eternally springing hope.

As with some thickly peopled and richly developed small country, the size of Powers' work is relative to the delight one feels on discovering it and immersing oneself in its particulars.

F. W. Dupee

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EHRENBURG AS HERO

PEOPLE AND LIFE, 1891-1921. By Ilya Ehrenburg. Knopf. $5.95.

Not long ago, Ehrenburg reports in a recent installment of his memoirs, a young writer asked him: "How did it happen that you came out alive?"[1] His reply was the same he gives in the introductory pages of the first volume: in the turbulent years he lived through, the fate of a man was decided entirely by chance, as in a "lottery." His answer is disingenuous, to say the least, but is fair warning that he has not written a personal confession, and that he will not respond to that terrible question totalitarian life has generated: "What right have you to be alive?" There is no laying bare of conscience, no excruciating—and we may be sure they would be—revelations of the intrigues and compromises that permit his physical presence among us.[2] His "lottery" image asks us and his Soviet readers not to expect the full portrait of the whole man, but to accept limits; in effect, to set aside *ad hominem* questions. In return he will give us something else, perhaps all he dares to, if he is to retain the right to address his compatriots.

He has written what I would call a didactic memoir, a version of his own experience that is designed to instruct not us but his Soviet audience in a whole range of facts and truths they have not been permitted to know ("young Soviet readers probably do not know that such a poet [K. D. Balmont] ever existed"). We must be clear about our own point of vantage: we are eavesdroppers, uninvited auditors in an informal course in Contemporary Culture from 1908 (the year he first arrived in Paris) to the present. He speaks to his benighted audience as an apostle of culture, a kind of talking guidebook naming all the great painters and writers and artistic movements of Europe. If Paris is the center and headquarters of culture—and the goddess of Ehren-

1. Here and at several other points I have drawn on later untranslated volumes of the memoirs. The book under review contains Volumes I and II. Volumes III and IV, covering the years between the wars, have appeared in Russian. The first installment of Volume V, dealing with World War II, was published in the January issue of *Novy Mir* this year. Theodore Shabad has reported from Moscow (*New York Times,* March 23) that the second installment has been withdrawn from the March issue of *Novy Mir* for supervised revisions. This is part of the cultural blackout that followed Khrushchev's earlier tirade on the arts.
2. T. R. Fyvel reviewed all that was available of Ehrenburg's record on this score in *Encounter* (December, 1961).

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burg's remembered world—the Café Rotonde is the inner shrine where his own initiation took place. Here he first met the people—Picasso, Modigliani, Léger, Max Jacob, Cendrars, Rivera, and scores of others—who fill the pages of his memoirs, and if his dream is to bring Paris to Moscow (and it is decidedly not the reverse) one suspects he would like to infect the Soviet cultural world with the intensity, the tolerance, the skepticism, the diversity, and the high seriousness which nourished the gifted men he met in the Rotonde.

Ehrenburg has made a career of knowing people. If we ask "what does he know?" the question dissolves into "whom does he know?" A discussion of Cubism becomes a catalogue of Cubists, freshened by vignette and anecdote. Indeed, whom did he *not* know? And that is the point of his life and of his message to younger Soviet generations. He did not belong in these brilliant circles because he was any kind of artist himself. Though he wrote "poetry" for years in Paris, he does not hide his present disgust with all of it. He was not an artist but the friend and confidant of artists. It is their names that crowd the pages of these memoirs and constitute his first lesson for his Soviet readers: he is populating an empty map, recreating a world they have not been allowed to know since Stalin isolated Russian culture from the West and from its own living tradition. In 1937 (unfortunate moment) he published an earlier autobiographical memoir, *A Book for Adults*, and was shocked to find that the editors had "removed whole pages of names which had become objectionable." Here they all are back again, now that Stalin is dead.

Merely by naming the names he revives the lost world of genuine culture. By giving them identity as people and as working artists he fulfills his second didactic intention: to create a vast portrait gallery showing his readers that the fraternity of artists covers the spectrum of human types. Idiosyncratic, contradictory, unpredictable, eccentric, his artists are drug addicts, theosophists, practical jokers, members of the nobility, part-time lunatics, hoboes, anti-Communists, Christians, political neutrals and, sometimes, Communists, albeit highly individualized ones (Picasso, Léger, Mayakovsky). The record of human variety constitutes a plea for the establishment of the conditions and attitudes that will permit—even encourage—the same kind of world at home. He is at great pains again and again, with an almost stylized tolerance, to separate the human and artistic from the ideological judgments. The guarantee of great art, it is quite clear, is an atmosphere free of dogma, uniformity, terror, Puritanism, philistinism, and of his own special *bête noire*, the "mechanization" of the human. A world, in short, in which

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courageous, experimental, self-defining, sensitive men can make art as they see fit.

For all he has to tell us about the lives of artists there is remarkably little on art itself. Sharp limits are imposed on the discussion of theories, of schools or individuals, of individual works of art. He restricts himself ("However, I am beginning to speak of my tastes in art, which is out of place,") and he is further restricted by his own intellectual incapacities, some acknowledged ("I am not an art critic and I am not writing a book on art"), many others unacknowledged and probably unknown to him. He is limited still further by his role as missionary and by his, no doubt, shrewd sense of the expectations and limitations of his Soviet audience. Much that he has to say about the nature of modern art resolves itself into a long and puerile polemic against the literal realism of Stalinist art. His pilgrimage to the art museums of Holland in 1914 yields only this: "Dutch painting is described as extremely realistic . . . but to use today's terminology, I should say that the old Dutch masters struck me as formalist"—a telling paradox, no doubt, in the schematic "terminology" of socialist realism, but meaningless to a sophisticated audience. He quotes Picasso's sly remark to a Leningrad painter: "You ought to nationalize the production of paint. At your factories they should manufacture mixed colors and label the tubes 'for the face,' 'for hair,' 'for military uniforms.' That would be much more practical." Writing of Modigliani's elongated nudes, he admonishes his readers: "It is absurd to say that Modigliani did not know how many vertebrae there are in a neck." All art is *about* life, is it not, and therefore all art is realism. The African sculptor simply *sees* the world in a different way. Guernica is a *picture* of the modern world caught in a new kind of vision. And life, he reminds his readers, is rich, varied, complex, sometimes tragic and sometimes inscrutable. And artists must be free to invent the new forms to contain their special visions. And so on. The New Wisdom in Moscow becomes a recitation of banalities in his beloved Paris ("in poetry you can say what cannot be said in prose") or even, one suspects, in modern Warsaw.

His assault on the literalists is also the announcement of a creed, recognizable, I think, as the well-meaning but essentially—and regrettably—pallid platform of the Soviet *avant-garde* today. His ultimate didactic aim is carefully gauged to the art of the possible, that is, to be effective finally within the horizons of the Soviet world. He has mobilized the resources of five decades of European and Russian culture to support the aims of his own "liberal" party in art.

Is there anything of value to be overheard in this dialogue of

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the one-eared and the deaf? Certainly, there is a great deal. There is the sheer panoramic breadth of the scene he unfolds as we follow his quick, brittle, shallow but immensely retentive mind as it darts across the map of European culture. The evocation of settings is sometimes brilliant. His kaleidoscopic pictures of Paris in 1914 and of Moscow in 1918 are compelling and fresh. From time to time he interrupts his chronological scheme to give full-length portraits of major figures. These set-pieces are uneven in quality: it is doubtful that his versions of Picasso, Modigliani and Léger add much to what we already know. But the sketches of Bryusov, Balmont, Voloshin, Mandelstam, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Tsvetayeva, and Meyerhold resurrect the living Russian tradition which Stalin distorted out of recognition or simply obliterated. This material cannot fail to be vivid and intensely interesting to anyone who cares about culture.

The ultimate value of this sprawling memoir will turn out, I think, to be historic. Travellers' reports and letters from Europe are deep in the Russian literary tradition and have served repeatedly as weapons in the periodic battles to wake Russia out of a deep isolationist sleep and to restore her to the main stream of European cultural evolution. The premise is the same for Ehrenburg in 1963 as it was for Kantemir in the early eighteenth century or Karamzin at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Russia is a European country and becomes culturally sterile whenever it cuts itself off from the center. Ehrenburg expresses a recurrent and powerful longing, one of the strongest rhythms in Russia's history, and, in its service, has hurled himself against the central rationalizations of Soviet power. The inner fortress is the Stalinist cosmology itself, enshrined in the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, the *summa totius theologiae* of Stalin's era. The Foreword to Volume I announced serenely in 1949 that the Soviet Union had become "the center of world civilization." This is the great central lie, the mother of all other lies, which Ehrenburg and all sensitive Russians know to be not only grotesquely false, but immeasurably harmful, if not fatal, to the continued existence of Russian culture.

The conflict is a mortal one—the superiority of the Soviet system, particularly as Khrushchev sees it, is itself called into question—and the outcome of the struggle, with such high stakes on the table, would seem to be foregone. But the odds are not so uneven as they seem. Khrushchev and his cultural hatchetmen Ermilov and Ilyichev are hopelessly ill-equipped to carry on the fight. They have shown repeatedly that they have nowhere to turn but to Stalinism, specifically to socialist realism,

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that is to say to a body of encrusted dogma that is simply unable to account for the modern world. Indeed, the entire crazy house of Stalin's culture has begun to sag visibly. Important ideological elements have come unstuck: the labor theory of value has recently been ground up in the Soviet computers and discarded; Soviet scientists at meetings abroad laugh out loud at the mention of dialectical materialism; the China split would suggest that history itself had got out of control. In short, the whole of Soviet Marxism would seem to be threatened with intellectual bankruptcy. Flexibility may develop in some disciplines but the cultural magistrates are in a *cul de sac*. They cannot go on calling a non-art art. They cannot quench the vitality of the imported forms (nor control their inward flow, for that matter), nor can they meet the hungers the new forms stimulate. And they cannot generate new forms out of an intellectual vacuum. Habits of scientific inquiry, of seeing the object clearly, and the precise, evocative use of language have eaten deeper into the ideological crust than a mind like Khrushchev's can admit or even recognize.

What Ilya Ehrenburg wants essentially is, to paraphrase Lenin, socialism plus electrification plus the Café Rotonde. He is unequivocal in his declarations of loyalty to his country and to its social system. His attacks on Stalin are reproaches against the man and his aberrant policies, but no more. In his sketch of Osip Mandelstam, the tenderest of all his reminiscences, he asks what harm this fussy eccentric little man with the magic poetic gift could possibly do. What good is possibly served by his death 10,000 kilometers from Moscow, in a concentration camp? Soviet life would have been enriched and sweetened by its poets. He wants to restore its corps of genuine artists, as adornments of the realm, and as persuasive witnesses in their work and in the example of their lives to the fallibility and to the creative potential of the human species.

But what he wants is not what the regime fears he will bring. He is a man in serious trouble, now, hedged in by a crisscross of charges —pro-Stalin(!), anti-regime, cosmopolitan, anti-Semitic—threatened now by Khrushchev's "help" in the traditional attitude of Russia's rulers toward troublesome intellectuals (Nicholas I and Pushkin, Catherine and her satirists). History, oddly, may have summoned this vulnerable man for heroism, even for martyrdom. These memoirs are the record of this man's life—far from completeness, farther from candor—but a self-portrait withal, of a Bohemian Bolshevik, a poet *manqué*, a quick and careless novelist, a sophisticated journalist, an effective literary politican, a man largely untroubled by the life of the mind (there

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is almost no mention of Marxism, for example), a man whose life takes on its primary meaning through the people he knew and the cafés he sat in. A man, too, with one of the most voluminous memories of modern times, perhaps the greatest *serious* gossip alive. And there is much more to come: Babel, Hemingway, Malraux, Gide, E. M. Forster, Huxley, Giono, Guéhenno—and countless more.

Rufus Mathewson

THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY

METATHEATRE. A NEW VIEW OF DRAMATIC FORM. By Lionel Abel. Hill & Wang. $1.45.

Modern discussions of the possibility of tragedy are not exercises in literary analysis; they are exercises in cultural diagnostics, more or less disguised. The subject of literature has pre-empted much of the energy that formerly went into philosophy, until that subject was purged by the empiricists and logicians. The modern dilemmas of feeling, action, and belief are argued out on the field of literary masterpieces. Art is seen as a mirror of human capacities in a given historical period, as the pre-eminent form by which a culture defines itself, names itself, dramatizes itself. In particular, questions about the death of literary forms—is the long narrative poem still possible, or is it dead? the novel? verse drama? tragedy?—are of the greatest moment. The burial of a literary form is a moral act, a high achievement of the modern morality of honesty. For, as an act of self-definition, it is also a self-entombment.

Such burials are customarily accompanied by all the displays of mourning; for we mourn ourselves, when we name the lost potential of sensibility and attitude which the defunct form incarnated. In his *Birth of Tragedy,* which is really about the death of tragedy, Nietzsche blamed the radically new prestige of knowledge and conscious intelligence —which arose in ancient Greece with the figure of Socrates—for the waning of instinct and of the sense of reality which made tragedy impossible. All subsequent discussions of the topic have been similarly elegaic, or at least defensive: either mourning the death of tragedy, or hopefully trying to make "modern" tragedy out of the naturalistic-sentimental theatre of Ibsen and Chekhov, of O'Neill, Miller, and Williams. It is one of the singular merits of Lionel Abel's book that the customary accent of lament is missing. Nobody writes tragedies any-

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more? Very well. Abel invites his readers out of the funeral parlor to come to a party, a party celebrating the dramatic form which is ours, has been ours in fact for three hundred years: the metaplay.

Indeed there is hardly reason to mourn, since the corpse was only a distant relative. Tragedy, says Abel, is not and never has been the characteristic form of Western theatre; most Western dramatists, bent on writing tragedy, have been unable to do so. Why? In a word: self-consciousness. First, the self-consciousness of the dramatist himself, and then that of his protagonists. "The Western playwright is unable to believe in the reality of a character who is lacking in self-consciousness. Lack of self-consciousness is as characteristic of Antigone, Oedipus, and Orestes, as self-consciousness is characteristic of Hamlet, that towering figure of Western metatheatre." Thus it is the metaplay—plots that depict the self-dramatization of conscious characters, a theatre whose leading metaphors state that life is a dream and the world a stage—which has occupied the dramatic imagination of the West to the same degree that the Greek dramatic imagination was occupied with tragedy. Two important historical observations follow from this thesis. One is that tragedy is simply much rarer than has been supposed—the Greek plays, one play of Shakespeare (*Macbeth*), and a few plays of Racine. Tragedy is not the characteristic form of the Elizabethan or Spanish theatre. Most Elizabethan serious drama consists of failed tragedies (*Lear, Doctor Faustus*) or successful metaplays (*Hamlet, The Tempest*). The other point relates to contemporary drama. In Abel's account, Shakespeare and Calderon are the two great sources of a tradition which is gloriously revived in the "modern" theatre of Shaw, Pirandello, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Brecht.

As a piece of cultural diagnostics, Abel's book is in the grand continental tradition of meditation on the tribulations of subjectivity and self-consciousness, inaugurated by the romantic poets and Hegel and continued by Nietzsche, Spengler, the early Lukacs, and Sartre. Their problems, their terminology loom behind Abel's spare untechnical essays. Where the Europeans are heavy, he travels light, without footnotes; where they write tomes, he has written a set of blunt essays; and where they are gloomy, he is crisply sanguine. In short, Abel has expounded a continental argument in the American manner: he has written the first American-style existentialist tract. His argument is clean-cut, pugnacious, prone to slogans, over-simplified—and, in the main, absolutely right. His book does not plumb the windy depths (but they are depths) of Lucien Goldmann's great work on Pascal, Racine, and the idea of tragedy, *Le Dieu Caché*, which I would guess Abel has learned from.

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But its virtues, not the least of which are directness and brevity, are formidable. To an English-speaking audience, unfamilar with the writings of Lukacs, Goldmann, Brecht, Duerrenmatt *et al.*, Abel's book should come as a revelation. It does Abel an injustice even to compare his *Metatheatre* with the superficiality of George Steiner's recent *Death of Tragedy* and Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*; no English or American writer on the theatre has done anything as interesting or sophisticated.

As I have suggested, the diagnosis presupposed in Abel's book—that modern man lives with an increasing burden of subjectivity, at the expense of his sense of the reality of the world—is not new. Neither are theatre pieces the principal documents of this attitude and of the correlative idea of reason as self-manipulation and role-playing. The two greatest documents of this attitude are Montaigne's *Essays* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*—both manuals of strategies which assume a gulf between the "public self" (the role) and the "private self" (the true self). The value of Abel's book lies in the forthright application of this diagnosis to the theatre. Never mind that Shakespeare called some of his plays tragedies. Surely Abel is right. The principal plays of Shakespeare—most of the putative tragedies, as well as most of the histories and comedies—are plays about self-consciousness, about characters not *acting* but *dramatizing themselves* in roles. Prince Hal is the man of perfected self-consciousness and self-control, triumphing over the man of rash, unselfconscious integrity, Hotspur, and over the sentimental, cowardly, self-conscious man of pleasure, Falstaff. While Achilles and Oedipus do not see themselves but *are* hero and king, Hamlet and Henry V do see themselves as acting parts, the part of the avenger or of the heroic confident king leading his troops to battle. Shakespeare's fondness for the play-within-a-play and for putting his characters into disguise for long stretches of the action is clearly part of the style of metatheatre, rather than of tragedy. The characters of metatheatre—from Prospero to the Police Chief in Genet's *Balcony*—are characters in search of an action.

I have said that Abel's main thesis is right. But it is also at points misstated or incomplete. I will mention three of these points.

First, the argument would be more complete, and I think somewhat altered, if Abel had considered what comedy is. Without wanting to suggest that comedy and tragedy divide the dramatic universe between them, I would argue that they are best defined in relation to each other. The omission of comedy is particularly striking when one considers that counterfeit, deceit, role-playing, manipulation, self-dramatization—basic

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elements of what Abel calls metatheatre—are staples of comedy from Aristophanes forward. Comic plots are stories either of conscious self-manipulation and role-playing (*Lysistrata, The Golden Ass, Tartuffe*) or else of improbably unselfconscious—under-conscious, one might say—characters (Candide, Buster Keaton, Gulliver, Harry Langdon, Don Quixote) playing strange roles which they assent to with a cheerful dumbness that secures their invulnerability. It might well be argued that the form which Abel calls the metaplay—particularly in its modern versions—represents a fusion of the posthumous spirit of tragedy with the most ancient principles of comedy. Some modern metaplays, like those of Ionesco, are obviously comedies. It is hard, too, to deny that Beckett is writing, in *Waiting for Godot, Krapp's Last Tape,* and *Happy Days,* a kind of *comedie noire.*

Second, Abel considerably oversimplifies, and I think indeed misrepresents, the view about the world which is necessary for the writing of tragedies. He says, "one cannot create tragedy without accepting some implacable values as true. Now the Western imagination has, on the whole, been liberal and skeptical; it has tended to regard *all* implacable values as false." This statement seems to me wrong, and where it is not wrong, superficial. (Abel is here perhaps too much under the influence of Hegel's analysis of tragedy, and that of Hegel's popularizers.) What are the implacable values of Homer? Honor, status, personal courage—the values of an aristocratic military class? But this is not what the *Iliad* is about. Simone Weil seems to me entirely right when she argues that the *Iliad*—as pure an example of the tragic vision as one can find—is about the emptiness and arbitrariness of the world, the ultimate meaninglessness of all moral values, and the terrifying rule of death and inhumane force. The tragedy of Oedipus is not caused by the fact that he, or his audience, believed in "implacable values." It is tragic so far as it exhibits the brute opaqueness of the world, the collision of subjective intention with objective fate. Oedipus is, after all, in the deepest sense, innocent; he is wronged by the gods, as he himself knows in *Oedipus at Colonnus.* Tragedy is a vision of nihilism, a heroic or ennobling vision of nihilism.

It is also untrue that Western culture has been on the whole liberal and skeptical. Post-Christian Western culture, yes. Montaigne, Machiavelli, the Enlightenment, the psychiatric culture of personal autonomy and health of the twentieth century, yes. But what of the dominant religious traditions of Western culture: were Augustine, Dante, Pascal, and Kierkegaard liberal skeptics? Certainly not. Therefore one must ask, why was there no Christian tragedy?—a question Abel never raises

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in his book, but which is strongly suggested by the assertion that belief in implacable values is the necessary ingredient for making tragedies. The answer is: that all works of Christian inspiration must contradict the tragic view. Dante's poem is a comedy. That is, it makes sense out of the world. There are no free-standing, arbitrary events in the world envisaged by Judaism and Christianity; all events make sense, are part of the plan of a just, good, providential deity; every crucifixion must be topped by a resurrection. Every disaster or calamity must be seen as either leading to a greater good, or else as just and adequate punishment fully merited by the sufferer. This moral adequacy of the world is precisely what tragedy denies. Tragedy says there are disasters which are not fully merited, that there is ultimate injustice in the world. So one might say that the final optimism of the prevailing religious traditions of the West, their will to see meaning in the world, prevented a rebirth of tragedy under Christian auspices; as, in Nietzsche's argument, reason, the fundamentally optimistic spirit of Socrates, killed tragedy in ancient Greece. The liberal, skeptical era of metatheatre only inherits this will to make sense from Judaism and Christianity; despite the exhaustion of religious sentiments, the will to make sense, to find meaning, prevails, although contracted to the idea of an action as the projection of one's idea of oneself.

The third caveat I would make is to Abel's discussion of the modern metaplays. It almost goes without saying that there is no such thing as the "theatre of the Absurd," a cheap, patronizing label utterly unfair to all works concerned. These works are, formally, in an old tradition. Yet the considerations of form which Abel addresses in his essays must not obscure differences in content and tone, which he slights. Shakespeare and Calderon construct metatheatrical *jeux d'esprit* in the bosom of a world rich in established feelings and a sense of openness. The metatheatre of Genet and Beckett reflects the feelings of an era whose greatest artistic pleasure is self-laceration, an era suffocated by the sense of eternal return, an era which experiences innovation as an act of terror. That life is a dream all the metaplays presuppose. But there are restful dreams, troubled dreams, and nightmares. The modern dream—which the modern metaplays project—is a nightmare, a nightmare of repetition, stalled action, exhausted feeling. Dreaming, and paying attention to one's dreams, is a more momentous, a more fateful act on certain occasions than on others.

For Brecht, particularly, whom Abel includes among the modern metadramatists, the category is misleading. At times Abel seems to use "naturalistic play" rather than "tragedy" as a foil for metatheatre.

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Brecht's plays are anti-naturalistic, didactic. But unless Abel is willing to call *The Play of Daniel* a metaplay—because it has on-stage musicians, and a narrator who explains everything to the audience, and invites them to see the play as a play, a performance—I cannot see that Brecht fits very well into the category. And much of Abel's discussion of Brecht is unhappily disfigured by callow Cold War platitudes. Abel argues that Brecht's plays must be metaplays because to write tragedies one must believe that "individuals are real" and one must "believe in the importance of moral suffering." (Does Abel mean the moral importance of suffering?) Since Brecht was a Communist, and since Communists do "not believe in the individual or in moral experience" (what does it mean to "believe" in moral experience? does he mean moral principles?), Brecht lacked the essential equipment to write tragedies; therefore, dogmatic as he was, Brecht could only write metatheatre—that is, make "all human actions, reactions, and expressions of feeling theatrical." This is nonsense. There is no more moralizing doctrine abroad today than Communism, no more sturdy exponent of "implacable values." What else is meant when Western liberals vulgarly call Communism a "secular religion"? And as for the familiar accusation that Communism does not believe in the individual, this is equally nonsense. It is not so much Marxist theory as the sensibility and historic traditions of the countries in which Communism has taken power, that do not and never have held the so-called Western idea of the individual, which separates off the "private" from the "public" self, seeing the private self as the true self which only lends itself grudgingly to the activities of public life. Neither did the Greeks, the creators of tragedy, possess the idea of the individual in the modern Western sense. There is a deep confusion in Abel's argument—his historical generalizations are mostly superficial—when he tries to make the absence of the individual the criterion of metatheatre.

Admittedly Brecht was a sly, ambivalent guardian of Communist "morality." But the secret of his plays is to be sought in his idea of the theatre as a moralizing instrument; hence his use of stage techniques borrowed from the non-naturalistic theatre of China and Japan, and his famous theory of stage production and acting—the Alienation Effect —which aims to enforce a detached, intellectual attitude upon the audience. (The Alienation Effect seems to be mainly a method of writing plays and of staging them, non-naturalistically; its effect as a method of acting, from what I have seen of the Berliner Ensemble, is mainly to moderate, to tone down, the naturalistic style of acting—not fundamentally to contradict it.) By assimilating Brecht to the

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metadramatists, with whom he surely shares something, Abel obscures the difference between Brecht's didacticism and the studied neutrality—the mutual cancellation of all values—which is represented by true metadramatists like Beckett, Genet, and Pirandello. Brecht has as much in common with these playwrights as Augustine's exercise in self-analysis has with Montaigne's. Both the *Confessions* and the *Essays* are didactic autobiographies: but while the author of the *Confessions* sees his life as a drama illustrating the linear movement of consciousness from egocentricity to theocentricity, the author of the *Essays* sees his life as a dispassionate, varied exploration of the innumerable styles of being a self.

There is a great deal else in Abel's important book which I have not even touched on for reasons of space: a charming short piece called "The Myth of Metatheatre," a dialogue on why no first-rate verse plays are being written any more, some brilliant discussions of particular plays of Shakespeare, Calderon, Racine, and Genet. I wish he had said something about Büchner and Kleist. The execrable translations from Racine unfortunately do not help a reader without French to concur in Abel's high estimate of Racine.

Susan Sontag

FASHIONS IN FICTION

RAISE HIGH THE ROOF BEAM, CARPENTERS AND SEYMOUR, AN INTRODUCTION. By J. D. Salinger. Little, Brown. $4.00.
THE SECOND STONE. By Leslie A. Fiedler. Stein & Day. $5.95.
ANOTHER COUNTRY. By James Baldwin. Dial. $5.95.
YOUNG CRANKSHAW. By Cecil Hemley. Harcourt, Brace. $4.50.

In order to create the volume titled *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters, and Seymour, an Introduction,* J. D. Salinger or his editor has reached into the historic past for a couple of *New Yorker* sketches or short stories, first published in 1955 and 1959. Some principle of strict economy has kept the author from providing a manageable title for his new diptych; he has, however, allowed some languid menial at Little, Brown to write the symbol "$4" on the jacket. As for the prose pieces inside the $4 covers, one feels a little silly about "reviewing" them at this late date. Presumably anyone who's interested in Salinger

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has had ample opportunity to make their acquaintance. Considered as works of literary art, they don't call for a great deal of comment. A surviving brother of the great Seymour Glass, Buddy, reports his recollections of several episodes in his brother's brief career. The first narrative describes the day of Seymour's marriage to Muriel, and is very prudently managed so that Seymour never makes an appearance. The second is a sequence of Buddy's agonized mopings and mowings before Seymour's sacred memory. Through extended sections of the latter sketch, Buddy turns into J. D. Salinger, who entertains us by complaining of all the strange stories people tell about him and reminding us how hard it is to be a writer. Finally, he works around to telling us a wonderful thing that Seymour did; it seems that at the age of ten, he intuitively understood a deep Zen principle which has since been widely publicized by Dr. Suzuki and associates. Well, it's not particularly interesting in itself, but when a ten-year-old kid thinks it up, you'll agree, that's pretty impressive.

Salinger has a remarkable gift for recording stupid speech; with blundering, insensitive people in exasperating situations, he fumbles and drags and muddles his dialogue to thoroughly satisfying effects. His characters are in effect verbal clowns, as grotesquely inefficient as Laurel and Hardy. And behind all their verbal vaudeville—the stalling, the fumbling, the pratfalls, slowdowns, double-takes, and side-business—one is supposed to feel the slow imminence of a religious revelation, *i.e.*, Seymour. But Seymour, though invincibly coy about reappearing, hasn't been coy enough; by now, it's perfectly clear that he's going to be a very third-rate Messiah.

How did Salinger get hung up on the idea that the Glass menage had to produce a Messiah? It's not really his line of work at all. His concern from the first was with the incoherently, callowly genuine; and with this theme he made excellent fun. But to be a prophet in the wilderness, Saint Salinger Cornishensis, he simply isn't equipped; he's got nostalgia, he's got confusion, but he has neither faith nor the structured intellect which properly produces it. Having promised a revelation for so long, he's more or less bound to oblige; and the sort of mouse his mountains are liable to yield may be guessed from the wretched rodent that squeaks forth at the end of *Seymour, an Introduction.*

Early in the nineteenth century, Joanna Southcott backed herself out onto something like Mr. Salinger's limb by announcing that she was pregnant through the agency of the Holy Ghost, and would produce Shiloh the Messiah before the year 1815. People were understandably

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bemused, since the lady was sixty-four years old; but she did look vaguely pregnant, a lot of discontented semi-literates needed something remarkable to believe in, and anyone could see it was a classic case of put up or shut up. Joanna managed to grasp both horns of the dilemma by perishing of a timely stomach tumor on December 27, 1814. It's an instructive fable. If Mr. Salinger can't forget about Seymour Glass altogether, he'd be well advised to hold back indefinitely his further appearance in the fiction. The one thing Seymour can't stand is a formal unveiling; put on that particular pedestal, it's a probable twelve to seven he'll turn out a tumor.

Leslie Fiedler's first novel, *The Second Stone*, must surely be one of the messiest novels ever written by a man of obvious literary ability. Describing the doings of some assorted American "intellectuals" in Rome, it is full of self-conscious and heavy-handed literary symbolism, so that the heroine is called Hilda in reference to Hawthorne's Roman young lady, and the hero explains archly that he's called Clem, though his name is really Marcus (there are two Marcus Stones—all I can say is, it's complicated) because of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. There's more, much more, in this vein, but I refrain in mercy. It's a novel persistently, even ostentatiously, obtrusive of armpits, groins, pubic hair, body odor, halitosis, heartburn, burps, belches, farts, urination, and vomit—not to mention soiled underwear, dirty sheets, unwashed bodies, and persistently foul-mouthed talk. These grubby props and bits of business add generously to the Roman atmosphere. Messiest of all is a kind of confused perspective which renders the limits and outlines of the author's satire completely indistinct. Oily Marcus Stone and his Conference on Love (attended chiefly by exhibitionists, opportunists, and queers) are obviously satiric butts; but his hysterical, promiscuous, pregnant wife Hilda and Clem Stone, the blocked would-be-autobiographical-novelist, draw and deserve just as much satiric fire, perhaps more. When one isn't sure how far the satire extends, or from what emplacement it is being delivered, most of its impact is lost, and it verges on buffoonery. One tends to look upon the characters as upon a can of worms, wriggling and indistinguishable. This reader had particular difficulty in distinguishing the fraudulence of Marcus Stone the knave from that of Marcus Stone the fool, as the shamefaced Americans seemed indistinguishable, in their search for personal advantage, from the blatant ones. When I've added that the motivation of the characters is frequently indistinct or unconvincing (why, for example, does Clem decide to return to Cleveland and the armpits of

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Selma; what does he think he's gaining or giving up by doing so?) and that the prose is flat, that about takes care of my complaints concerning *The Second Stone.*

Yet, for all its deficiencies, Fiedler's novel is not a dead piece of work, as many better-composed pieces are. It's loathsome, mawkish, pretentious; it transports us into a world where practically every fresh and spontaneous sentiment has been depraved by the self-pitying, self-loathing, self-serving, omnipresent ego. Its world is a world of creeps. Yet the book is alive, with the weird vitality of an interminable bad dream. One is caught up in the fake emotions of its fake characters, and in their endless, hopeless preoccupation with the genuine. It's a novel which invites, and seems prepared to relish, all the criticisms I've made of it; its surface is not armor-plated but gummy, like fly-paper; and given its peculiar objective, to imbed the reader in muck, it's remarkably resourceful in its tactics.

In the end, no doubt, I'm bound to quarrel with the objective Fiedler has proposed to himself—his means being very nicely proportioned to that end. The book buries its reader deep in feebly distinguished varieties of egomania, loses horizon, and finally disappears into the pretensions it was half-attacking; it's a treatise on suffocation which proceeds to the absolutely logical conclusion of stifling the reader. I feel curiously grateful to the author for a revelation, and don't suppose it matters whether he knows himself how much he's revealed. As for subtitling the novel "A Love Story," this, I take it, is just Mr. Fiedler's private joke; I mean, he's got to be kidding, doesn't he? The other possibility is simply too much to contemplate.

James Baldwin has written, in *Another Country,* the big novel everyone has thought for years he had in him. It is a work of great integrity and great occasional power; but I'm afraid I can do no more than the damned compact liberal majority has done, and pronounce it an impressive failure. Spiritually, it's a pure and noble novel; though it's largely populated by perverts, bums, queers, and tramps, with only an occasional contemptible square interspersed, I wasn't much distressed by their comings, couplings, and goings. They are looking for love in some fairly unlikely ways and places, but the commodity is a rare one, and we can't afford to overlook possibilities. No, the book's faults are mainly technical. One of them has to do with the difficult question of dialect. Most of Mr. Baldwin's characters are of the hipster persuasion, or at least on the near fringe of hipsterism, and the patois he makes them talk has most of the faults of artifice and few of the merits of originality. In effect, their argot is dull and uninventive. We are

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supposed to feel about many of these characters that they're proud, sensitive, suffering souls; it is thoroughly depressing to find, when they open their lips flecked with anguish, that, man, they talk like trite. They're always mouthing about "making it" and if they could break the shackles of their degenerate dialect, it's indeed conceivable that they might make a phrase or an image or something. Mr. Baldwin, as anyone knows who's acquainted with his writing, has an ear for poetic speech and a gift for the discriminating phrase. These qualities make themselves felt from time to time in *Another Country*; but mostly they lie buried under a verbal pattern which in very short order proves tiresome and finally turns into a version of the Chinese water torture.

Akin to this matter of regional dialect is a problem of debauched vocabulary. In a social milieu where "m . . . . . r" is a term of casual endearment, the problem of expressing strong irritation is acute indeed. I'm not protesting profanity, just observing that when we start here, there isn't much gamut for the language to run. In fact, the artistic high point of the book for me was Vivaldo's dream, a scene of warm power and unstrained simplicity, quite out of tone with the rest of the novel. On another level, I don't suppose anyone has described the scene of homosexual love with more simplicity and directness and perhaps even reverence than Baldwin; through no fault of the author's, I don't think these scenes are in complete command of their overtones. No doubt the day will come when we accept scenes of homosexual love as naturally as scenes of heterosexual love; perhaps we should even encourage it to come quickly. Yet we are, culturally, what we are (*tant pis pour nous*), and a fair percentage of Mr. Baldwin's readers will squirm uneasily when Eric lays his curly head on Vivaldo's manly bosom and cuddles into beddy-bye. Finally, someone at Dial Press should have had the common sense or primitive energy to go over Mr. Baldwin's pidgin-French and reduce its aimless vagaries to elementary correctness.

Having expressed in all these ways one's sense that Mr. Baldwin's novel is a failure, one must still say that it's the sort of failure that does him enormous credit. It's a big, tough, ugly achievement, Like most novels, it's better at diagnosing problems than at solving them, and better at simply screaming with pain than at diagnosis; but it doesn't at all blunt one's sense that Baldwin is a high and dedicated talent. His search for a discipline to go with his themes will some day have happier issue than *Another Country*.

Cecil Hemley's *Young Crankshaw* is America's answer to Britain's William Cooper—a trim, old-fashioned little novel of dry social comedy,

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the ultimate ancestor of which is Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man.* Mr. Hemley's Crankshaw is an innocent who is used, abused, betrayed, cuckolded, and educated by Rafferty, a veritable bounder. The milieu is the left-wing bohemia of the 1930's, and Mr. Hemley distills a good deal of controlled and gentle fun from the slogans, sexplay, and careerism of that lusty, vigorous era. The whole thing, however, seems rather too much for Crankshaw, who has about him more than a trace of the nebbish. He learns in the end to see a kind of evil which the reader has been impatient with him, all along, for not recognizing. And then, in what must surely be the most unexpected, anti-climactic sentence of the decade, he finds God. "If there was no God," he discovers, "Rafferty was the world." The enthymeme is amazing. On the evidence of the novel itself, Rafferty is plainly the world, whether there's a God or not; indeed, it's very probable that God *is* Rafferty, or at least more like Rafferty than Crankshaw. But his last-second appearance makes *Young Crankshaw* a complete 1960's novel about the 1930's; God appears just where the Internationale and proletarian solidarity used to, as an instant answer to unemployment, stomach ulcers, bad breath, and self-contempt. It's too bad, for the gaiety of the novel is under good control most of the way.

Robert M. Adams

CASTRO'S REVOLUTION

CASTRO'S REVOLUTION: MYTHS AND REALITIES. By Theodore Draper. Frederick A. Praeger. $4.50.

Castro's Cuba has stirred more passionate debate in the United States than any event in Latin America since the Mexican revolution. In less than four years, there has been a torrent of books on Cuba's history, on Fidel Castro's movement, on the question of an alien power so close to the Florida shoreline. Among these works, most of which are propaganda for the extreme left or right, the essays of Theodore Draper, now collected in a book, stand out.

The substance of *Castro's Revolution* is in three long essays originally published in *Encounter.* "The Two Revolutions," the first essay, is given to the theme that—despite the myths created by people like Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Huberman and Sweezy, and the late C. Wright Mills—the Cuban revolution "was essentially a middle-class revolution that has been used to destroy the middle class." Fidel Castro had no

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proletarian and very little peasant backing outside the Sierra Maestra region. The Cuban revolt was a movement of Havana University students and young intellectuals, supported only by the total apathy of the people. Indeed, the workers—who did quite well under Batista—refused to join a general strike, which had been Castro's original design for victory when isolated in the mountains. At most, the Fidelista army consisted of only a few thousand men, and Castro's success was due to the collapse of Batista's regime in a morass of disgust and confusion. It was "a universal revulsion," rather than a clash of fascist and socialist ideologies.

The "two revolutions" are the ideal one professed by Castro before the overthrow of Batista and the real one he created after crushing all opposition and attaining dictatorial power. Theodore Draper shows with an imposing array of facts that the "Marxist-Leninist" revolution Castro developed after an initial period of uncertainty had nothing to do with his promises and was, in fact, the very reverse of the social democratic society to which he vaguely had been committed. The middle class had pressed for the values of such a society, and its desertion of Batista was the prime reason for his defeat. The first signs that Castro was ready to abandon his earlier principles and those who supported them came in 1959, when he began to stack the 26th of July Movement, the rebel army, and the unions—the main centers of independent power —with Communists who were totally dependent upon him and naturally disposed toward monolithic structures. It was personal, total power that Fidel Castro was out for, in order to recreate the state along national socialist lines. Hence, he had to destroy all independent men and organizations, and base his power on the disciplined hierarchy of the Popular Socialist (Communist) Party.

"How Not To Overthrow Castro," the second essay, deals with the invasion fiasco. Draper first reviews the successive waves of refugees pouring out of Cuba to show how the internal tensions on the island were reflected among the emigrés themselves The initial group in 1959 was the *Batistianos*. The rich followed shortly thereafter. The main exodus started a year later, when the middle class gave up hope in the new Cuba. By the end of 1960, members of the 26th of July Movement began fleeing the country, including prominent ministers under Castro. In 1961, 100,000 refugees of all shades of political opinion were grouped in Florida.

The response of U.S. leaders was ambiguous to begin with. Vice-President Nixon early in 1959 already had proposed training Cuban guerrilla forces to overthrow Castro, but the suggestion was turned

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down; the official Washington—and C.I.A.—position at the time regarded Castro as only a somewhat wild radical. However, by the end of 1959 events accumulated—especially the jailing of Huber Matos as a "traitor" simply because he spoke up against the Communists—which changed influential minds. In the spring of 1960, Eisenhower made his decision and the training began which culminated in the invasion a year later.

The C.I.A., charged with the operation, picked moderate Cuban elements as a liaison with the invasion army. Since the military operation was "nonpolitical," former members of Batista's army were admitted, and their proportion rose steeply in the officer corps. But the new refugees, the leftist 26th of July Movement people who were pouring in by late 1960, refused to work with the *Batistianos* and emphasized the importance of the anti-Castro underground in the composition of any new government.

Events in Cuba resolved this dilemma. Castro moved more and more left until in early 1961 the regime began to resemble an Eastern European appendage of Moscow. Pressures for an immediate invasion grew. The left and center refugee heads met again and buried the hatchet. They agreed on the necessity of tying in the Cuban underground with any direct assault. But the accord was signed only twelve days before the C.I.A. blew the whistle, and the underground was never called out. In fact the Cuban Revolutionary Council itself was ignored by the C.I.A., as though it had nothing to do with the invasion; it "served as a fig leaf for the invasion." The anti-Castro forces inside Cuba were not alerted and by the time they were, the assault had been crushed.

Draper states the facts carefully—viewing Cuba as a fixed object under the microscope, to which things happen in isolation. One might add that he ignores the obvious, that despite sophisticated analysis as to whether the underground was more important than the invasion force, or vice versa, the Cuban militia did fight hard for Castro and there were no popular uprisings in city or country. This is not an indication of a regime in full collapse. Probably the first modern dictator to distribute arms to the people at a time of crisis, Castro was rewarded when these same people fought for, and not against, him. An independent observer might conclude that this is the prime lesson of the Cuban invasion; yet Draper does not even mention it.

"Castro and Communism," the third essay, is a summary of the movement toward Moscow, the relentless destruction of the 26th of July Movement and the fusion of its remnants with the Communists, a

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process paralleled by the shift of trade from the United States to Russia.

By the summer of 1960 the original revolutionists and the foes of Communism were removed from office. The voice of the head of the Popular Socialist (Communist) Party, Blas Roca, began to be heard all over. At the time of the invasion attempt, Fidel Castro formally announced the espousal of "Marxist-Leninism." The 26th of July Movement and the Popular Socialist Party were combined into a new organ called the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations, which later became the United Party of the Socialist Revolution.

The wheel had come full turn. The Communists, who supported Batista almost to the bitter end, had violently criticized the Fidelistas as petty-bourgeois romantics. The 26th of July Movement had been a repository of social democratic thought, contemptuous of Communism. Bit by bit, with the most deceptive tactics, alternately beguiling and pushing his own supporters, Castro had purged first the army, then the labor unions, and finally his own party, until only a shell remained, which was then turned over to the faithful adherents of Moscow.

Parallel with this movement was the economic shift. When the United States broke off all trade with Cuba in late 1960, both Ché Guevara and Raúl Castro—Fidel's two closest allies—hailed it as a liberation from economic slavery. In fact, Raúl Castro had been looking forward to it. In the summer of 1960, over seventy-five per cent of Cuba's exports still went to non-Communist countries; within one year, the exact reverse obtained. Cuba had become the Puerto Rico of the U.S.S.R.

The economic nationalization program which followed was more rapid than that of Russia's East European satellites. Ninety per cent of all Cuban industry was taken over by the state. This precipitated a wholesale flight of technicians and skilled administrators. Serious shortages began to appear. And the inevitable consequences of a trade shift from a natural market less than one hundred miles away to an unnatural market (Russia is self-sufficient in cane sugar) five thousand miles away became more and more evident. Shortages were met by discontent and discontent was countered by terror. Within three years, as Draper puts it, "Cuba has . . . entered into a stage of forced industrialization, revolutionary terror and a totalitarian state party."

Draper spends considerable time on the question of whether Fidel Castro had always been a Communist. He quite properly rejects the Bolshevik-infested visions Nathaniel Weyl propounds in *Red Star Over Cuba*. He also, by implication, rejects Daniel James' thesis of two Cuban

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Communist parties, the "old" Popular Socialist and the "new" 26th of July Movement. After reviewing many speeches made by Castro, it is Draper's conclusion that: "(1) Practical and political differences held him apart from the official Communists at least through part of 1959. (2) He went over to them bag and baggage as a result not only of concrete pressures after the taking of power but of latent tendencies within him that go back to his university days."

In his foreword Draper says he added four pages, dealing with a discussion of U.S. policy toward Cuba; up to this point, it would appear that Cuba existed in a political and economic vacuum. Draper never makes a single reference to American history in the Caribbean, American political pressures and business interests operating in and on Cuba, aside from an isolated quote from C. Wright Mills. If it is true (and in this I agree with Draper) that "the revolution was made and always controlled by declassed sons and daughters of the middle class," what frightful pressures and abominations they must have experienced to agree to so complete a reversal of their revolutionary ideals!

Castro's Revolution is an excellent example of how all the details do not add up to the truth. I happen to agree with the author that Fidel Castro, in common with many outraged intellectuals of underdeveloped countries, was drawn by the evangelical message of state socialism to the point where a crash program for industrialism outweighed his concern with personal liberties. In 1959, when I spent some time in Havana, the beginning of the process was quite apparent, and a key to the future was the fact that the Popular Socialists (Communists) were the only licensed political party. Less than a year later, on my next trip, I was arrested simply for having expressed at a Castro rally the view that Cuban policy was leading to economic chaos. Toward the end of 1960, on my last visit, the two leading Havana hotels where I stayed had migrated East: the first was filled with Iron Curtain technicians and the second was the headquarters for the Chinese Communist delegation. It was obvious that Fidel Castro was disposed by his own emotions and intellectual bias to move toward some species of orthodox Marxism as much as he was impelled in that direction by outside forces.

In this, he was not different from many leaders of new countries. And here is where the weakness of the Draper analysis becomes evident. For the Cuban revolution from its beginnings, by its peculiar history, geography and economy, was destined to be perverted as the pressures and counter-pressures between the U.S. and Cuba started to crystallize. The most cursory knowledge of the American presence in the Caribbean area should make the intelligent reader aware of these factors. It would

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be unfair to say that Draper ignores this history; he specifically indicts U.S. policy on several occasions. But he does not give proper weighting, which is as serious an error in historical analysis as in statistics.

Cuba is only a symbol of the problem facing the U.S. as Latin America grows in population and seeks its own destiny. Unless Americans attempt to view themselves and their history as others see them (and Cuba is a prime example of this history at its worst), there can be no basis for participation in a joint program of common welfare. That is why our parochial feeling of superiority and our failure to acknowledge our responsibility must be challenged, or far more serious Cubas are ahead. In releasing us from culpability, therefore, Draper—for the best motives—is doing a disservice. The essential point is not so much to attack or defend Castro for what he has done, but to see his reactions in true perspective in order to throw a spotlight on our errors. For as long as interests dominate the foreign policy of the United States for their own personal gain we will continue to create the conditions which breed Castros.

Daniel M. Friedenberg

EDITORS NOTE: This review was written before the Cuban crisis last fall and therefore does not go into the question of Russian arms or soldiers in Cuba.

TWO WOUNDS AND NO BOW

THE NEW ROMANTICS: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE NEW CRITICISM. By Richard Foster. Indiana University Press. $5.75.

The New Criticism has certainly fallen on evil days. In 1956, Mr. T. S. Eliot, to whom all New Critics have looked reverently for inspiration, repudiated their connection and even expressed irritation at the device of *explication du texte* as practiced on his own poetry. Now Richard Foster, winner of a Longview award, who obviously has gone to school to the New Critics, charges that they are:

> . . . twentieth-century romantics whose sensibilities *as romantics* over-balance whatever traditionalist viewpoints they may explicitly subscribe to: that their romanticism has been part of the 'romantic reaction' against science and reason which they themselves have observed and sometimes criticized in the art and thought of this and the last century; that they have tended to oppose poetry to science in the manner of the Romantic

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> poets; and that, again like the Romantics, in order to raise that opposition above the level of a merely desperate emotional reaction, they have developed and promoted a supporting theoretical doctrine that poetry is a high form of knowledge.

This charge, sweeping but categorical, is made specific in an examination of the statements, particularly the recent ones, of I. A. Richards, Eliseo Vivas, R. P. Blackmur, and Allen Tate, with many scattered quotations from Jacques Maritain, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and others. Strange parallels are found between their views and those of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, and even of Matthew Arnold. Foster shows that each of the New Critics has gone further and further from an analytical examination of the work itself in the direction of abstract generalization and metaphysical statement. Among them they have developed a "New Critical mystique of poetry" which makes it superior to all other kinds of knowledge. Thus Vivas writes that "The poet brings forth values with which history is in the pain of labor." And Tate sums up the position when he says: "If a poem is a real creation, it is a kind of knowledge we did not possess before. It is not knowledge 'about' something else; the poem is the fullness of that knowledge."

The New Criticism has survived a great variety of attacks, always to regain its self-assurance. Scholars have patiently demonstrated that wrong interpretations have resulted from wrenching a text out of its time, from reaching a conclusion at variance with biographical fact, from ascribing conduct to a protagonist out of harmony with the manners of the society in which he was bred, from reading metaphors without a history of their previous usage. It has been pointed out that timidity has confined the criticism of the New Critics to undisputed classics; it is much too "chancy" to hail a new young writer on the basis of one's own enthusiasm—if one ever has enthusiasms. They have castigated what they call "materialism" and "scientism" without knowing quite what they mean. Purely human activities have left them untouched. They have been suspected of snobbery and cliquishness. Yet none of these charges is so heinous as those which Mr. Foster has successfully pressed against them—he has come at them where they live, for if they are romantics, they cannot conceivably be governed by tradition or the detached rationality they have always professed. They are as impressionistic as Arthur Symons, whose limitations, discovered by Eliot, started all the dither.

Having admitted that " 'Romantic' would seem, after all, to be about the worst thing one could call a New Critic," Foster chooses an extra-

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ordinary path away from apostasy; he takes it all back—the New Critics have redeemed themselves by turning criticism into poetry. His prime example of the critic as poet is Richard P. Blackmur. One could wish for his sake that he had chosen another, for possibly no critic has written a more cumbersome prose than Blackmur and no one has coined a critical language with less grace. Think, without trying to know what is meant, of describing *The Tragic Muse* as belonging to "the executive form" of the novel. One will be continually puzzled by Blackmur's special scientisms until one discovers that Blackmur calls a poem "an institution." And so it is, precisely in the definition of Thorstein Veblen: "An institution is a cluster of habits and customs, ways of doing things and ways of thinking about things, both of them sanctioned by long practice and the community's approval." But this suggests that the Prefaces of Henry James have been maligned as the models for Blackmur's prose: its true source is *The Theory of the Leisure Class.* Though Edmund Wilson once described Karl Marx memorably as "the poet of commodities," one doubts if the soft-spoken Norwegian should be known as "the lyricist of conspicuous waste." Or Blackmur, "the bard of Loose and Baggy Monsters." Yet one might be impelled to, since Blackmur's later criticism is here ardently described as "in bulk an evocative, insight-giving, impressionistic semi-poetry." The attack has been with a cleaver; the defense with a cream-puff.

Oscar Cargill

NEW POEMS

THE END AND THE BEGINNING. By Robinson Jeffers. Random House. $3.95.
WATER STREET. By James Merrill. Atheneum. $1.65.
ABSENT AND PRESENT. By Chester Kallman. Wesleyan University Press. $1.45.

In *The End and the Beginning,* Robinson Jeffers' posthumously published volume, there is a short poem called "Vulture," one of the best in the book, that shows us the most we can expect from a writer for whom human values don't exist, and for whom man is less than peripheral. Early one morning Jeffers lay on a hillside overlooking the ocean. He lay very still on his back. A vulture up in the sky mistook him for a dead man and began circling down. The vulture came

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so close that Jeffers could look into his red face, whereupon the poet addressed him:

'My dear bird, we are wasting time here.
These old bones will still work; they are not for you.'
But how beautiful he looked gliding down
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away
in the sea-light over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by
that naked beak and become part of him, to share those
wings and those eyes—
What a sublime end of one's body; what an enskyment; what
a life after death.

On occasions like this Jeffers can become positively polite—the Prufrock of the eagle's aerie. When Jeffers has written about hawks, vultures, stallions, even fish, in the past, he has been able to invest his poetry with those human values he denies when he writes about men: courage, nobility, beauty, sympathy, affection. About "God's apes" he can only reassure the earth (for the hundredth time in print): "The troublesome race of man, O beautiful planet, is not immortal."

Jeffers' was as good a refutation as anyone could wish of C.P. Snow's seam-splitting argument that the scientific and literary cultures should be bridged—somehow. "Somehow" was the way Jeffers did it. Had Jeffers never looked through a telescope nor read a scientific handbook (his knowledge of science may have been beyond handbooks, but the poems don't show it) his achievement would have been much greater today. Only when he writes about animals does he seem to be human and really a poet, which is good enough, but he should have written about animals more. Instead, this (from "Star-Swirls") is what he is more likely to give us.

What a pleasure it is to mix one's mind with geological
Time, or with astronomical relax it.
There is nothing like astronomy to pull the stuff out of man.

If the man is a poet the last line is certainly true, and the rhythm of many of these poems proves that astronomical time is nothing if not relaxing:

The universe expands and contracts like a great heart.
It is expanding, the farthest nebulae
Rush with the speed of light into empty space.
It will contract, the immense navies of stars and galaxies . . .
(etc., etc.)

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There is no human being in Jeffers' poetry who seems adequately realized. Men and their consciousness are regrettable but disposable accidents in the vast processes of the universe. This has always made writing poems at all seem like creative cheating, which, in a sense, it was for Jeffers. Nevertheless there are in the present volume, as always, moving passages, and even whole poems—"Oysters," for example. How does one explain it? By saying that Jeffers was a poet who was literally redeemed by the animals and the birds. (I don't count the rocks.)

Jeffers held the consciousness of man in contempt but thought he knew the great scientific and cosmic laws and forces behind or beyond that consciousness. This is one of the risks and fatuities of being a "scientific" poet, and it makes Jeffers seem old-fashioned now. The position is reversed today, when we are deeply interested in consciousness, but are not at all sure we know much about its objects. One of the most accomplished and serious young American poets now writing is James Merrill. His last book, *Water Street,* provides an illuminating contrast to Jeffers.

Many years ago T.S. Eliot spoke of the terrifying honesty of Blake's poems. He was thinking of the direct vision of the lyrics; but there is also a terrifying honesty of a quite different kind in the Prophetic Books, in which Blake pursues and charts the descent or fall of man's mind into a condition of psychological divisiveness. Without suggesting a Blakean element in Mr. Merrill's poetry, it seems to me that he has something of this second kind of honesty. He analyzes relentlessly the unstable and shifting states and frontiers of consciousness, seemingly rootless, that betray man's personality or identity in the modern world. The mind's intense awareness of its own complications and insecurities is the starting point of many of his poems. As the theme is attenuated, so must the poems often be—but the subject is not pursued from curiosity, but for self-knowledge.

Man is conscious, but of what? This is the perplexing question that broods over many of Merrill's poems, along with the associated question of what consciousness—and hence identity—really is. The nature of art and the significance of the creative process depend on the answers brought to these questions.

The predicament explored in Merrill's poetry was once described by Ernst Cassirer:

> No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of

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> dealing with the things themselves, man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artistic medium. . . . He . . . lives in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in fantasies and dreams.

This kind of metaphysical insecurity has become the ground of our feelings and uncertainties, and everywhere it has entered into our art. Its marks in society are instability in our relationships, a fear of ultimates, and bottomless doubts about ourselves. We are obsessed with a terror that behind a world of illusory appearances there may be nothing at all.

It is the concentrated intensity with which Mr. Merrill *feels* the hollowness of this world of forms and appearances that makes him one of the best poets we have. Few if any of our writers have understood so well what it means to live in a merely symbolic world, or have expressed so vigorously the determination to break through the tissue of shadow forms to a persisting reality. The first poem in *Water Street*, "An Urban Convalescence," is an expression of this desire to penetrate appearances to whatever lies beyond. Beginning with line 9, the poem reads in part:

As usual in New York, everything is torn down
Before you have had time to care for it.
Head bowed, at the shrine of noise, let me try to recall
What building stood here. Was there a building at all?
I have lived on this same street for a decade.

Wait. Yes. Vaguely a presence rises
Some five floors high, of shabby stone
—Or am I confusing it with another one
In another part of town, or of the world?—
And over its lintel into focus vaguely
Misted with blood (my eyes are shut)
A single garland sways, stone fruit, stone leaves,
Which years of grit had etched until it thrust
Roots down, even into the poor soil of my seeing.
When did the garland become part of me?
I ask myself, amused almost,
Then shiver once from head to toe.

Transfixed by a particular cheap engraving of garlands
Bought for a few francs long ago,
All calligraphic tendril and cross-hatched rondure,

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Ten years ago, and crumpled up to stanch
Boughs dripping, whose white gestures filled a cab,
And thought of neither then nor since.

Also, to clasp them, the small, red-nailed hand
Of no one I can place. Wait. No. Her name, her features
Lie toppled underneath that year's fashions.
The words she must have spoken, setting her face
To fluttering like a veil, I cannot hear now,
Let alone understand.

So that I am already on the stair,
As it were, of where I lived,
When the whole structure shudders at my tread
And soundlessly collapses, filling
The air with motes of stone.
Onto the still erect building next door
Are pressed levels and hues—
Pocked rose, streaked greens, brown whites.
Who drained the pousse-café?
Wires and pipes, snapped off at the roots, quiver.

Well, that is what life does. I stare
A moment longer, so. And presently
The massive volume of the world
Closes again.

Upon that book I swear
To abide by what it teaches:
Gospels of ugliness and waste,
Of towering voids, of soiled gusts,
Of a shrieking to be faced
Full into, eyes astream with cold—

With cold?
All right then. With self-knowledge.

Time and space, represented here by the successive generations of houses and their three dimensional forms, are illusory. The reality that matters is focused inwardly—the image misted with blood, for the poet's eyes are shut. The sculptured garland (now only an image in the mind) above the door of the vanished building fades into a corresponding image of "a particular cheap engraving of garlands/ Bought for a few francs years ago," and this in turn evokes by association a half-recollected figure who herself dissolves in the anonymity of high fashion. These figures exist only as part of the poet's consciousness: "When did the garland become part of me?" They are symbols, but

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symbols of what? The poet doesn't know, but the questioning mind, pursuing such clues as the symbols provide, is "already on the stair,/ As it were, of where I lived." That is to say, a glimmering comes through of the hidden cypher that would give life and coherence to these meaningless symbols. Returning to where he lived (*i.e.*, coming into the discovery of his central self or identity) "the whole structure" suddenly dissolves. Man has so enveloped himself in symbols that he can know nothing except by the interposition of this medium. Since the fact of identity is not symbolic, but the ultimate point of reference, the essential revelation is still withheld.

At this point most poets capable of coming so far would end on a note of nihilism or passive resignation; but it is precisely at this point, in the last eight lines of my quotation, that Merrill's poetry exhibits more than usual strength and bravery. The firm moral determination behind the "oath" is present in the tightened rhythm of the shortened lines and in the tone of heightened ceremony suitable for a ritual occasion. There is nothing grandiose in the stance: the momentary elevation subsides almost at once into the matter-of-fact stoicism of

With cold?
All right then. With self-knowledge.

And self-knowledge, it must be remembered, in a world where identity vanishes at the moment of discovery, and where the appearances of life are merely symbols grounded in meaninglessness. The difficulty he confronts is immense. I scarcely know whether in these fine lines the poetry is validated by the courage they express, or the courage grows out of the poetry: but both are present and are one.

The poem may be summed up, rather roughly, like this: In the beginning the symbolic images that compose the poet's (or any man's) world appear to be unrelated to a significant and enduring pattern or centre in his experience. Only through heroic determination is a victory of form (and hence of meaning) achieved. Form emerges first through the poet's discovery and growing knowledge of himself, and subsequently through the discipline of art applied to that knowledge. If the second point is only implicit in "An Urban Convalescence," it is clearly enough stated in later poems which, unfortunately, there is not space to write of here.

Most poets are not troubled consciously by metaphysical problems. They write about their dachshunds, their children, Manhattan, gardening—something of that sort. But there is a kind of poet who might be termed anti-metaphysical. He is consciously concerned with keeping

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the kind of problems we have been considering out of his poems, which, paradoxically, gives them a metaphysical edge. I suppose Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát* is the classic example of this kind of poetry.

For 'Is' and 'Is-NOT' though with Rule and Line
And 'UP-AND-DOWN' by Logic I define,
Of all that one should care to fathom, I
Was never deep in anything but—Wine.

It is an attractive kind of poetry because, superficially at least, it seems to be near the heart of most men's experience. Whether it can claim an ultimate sanity or not, it has the reassuring look of common sense. Surprisingly, the successful embodiments of this attitude in poetry are relatively rare. To be insistently concerned with rejecting such problems suggests an unusual awareness of them, and to make the rejection with the necessary lightness requires a self-irony that few poets possess.

On the basis of his last volume, *Absent and Present,* Mr. Chester Kallman belongs to this tradition. He can write Gilbertian verse ("Look on the Ant") so adeptly that one wants to sing rather than read it. But his best poems belong to a more astringent and suggestive mode. Here is "The Greek Anthologists":

They feared physicians and sleeping alone the most,
And death was a hovering bother related to both:
The fly that spoilt the summer, the maiden aunt
Whose presence would halt the Athenian conversation.

'Beware' they wrote in margins next to tragic statements;
Were addicted to hands
That, knowing their own, took possession quickly.
They never forgot
The brevity of beauty nor the beauty
Of being brief.

The poem is a comment on conduct viewed in a pragmatic context. It is concerned with the well-lighted and comfortable possibilities of life, and it deliberately closes the friendly shutters on the encroaching dark. It succeeds because it knows exactly what it is doing—which way, at a given moment of speech, *not* to look. It undervalues none of the problems it snubs, which is why it is able to ignore them gracefully. Few poets can achieve this. It is a matter of poise and a deep knowingness. Ironic self-awareness is indispensable for this mode of writing, and a taut economy of phrasing which will allow no shadows between the lines.

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Consider with what artfulness the connotations of death are controlled in the following verse. Death here seems more macabre than in Jeffers, but its larger, darker implications are carefully chained up for the night:

By the sunless pool of an all too
Marble Diana in Caserta's gardens
A pre-ruined Pompeiian arcade
Has been built underground with a view
Through its crafty dilapidations
Of umbrella pines sheer overhead:
Such works, tastefully conceived
Out of native excavations,
Waken bland foreshadowings
Of the best in being dead.

The last line irresistibly raises the image in my mind of shrouds by Dior. But perhaps the best commentary on the attitude Mr. Kallman has formulated here is a couplet from another of his poems:

No dear, that's not Avernus, that's the edgy spout
Through which the percolated coffee must come out.

Marius Bewley

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VARIETY

THE SICK WHITE NEGRO

I was intrigued to see how he made out in his own country. It was a year since I had seen him in England. When he arrived in London everything he knew about England he had got from the movies. It was a country set in the heart of India bossed by a Queen who wore a ball dress. The population had bad teeth, wore drab clothes and went in for furtive and bizarre murders.

England knew nothing about Lenny Bruce, reserving as it does a regrettably complacent and patronising ignorance for most aspects of the American scene. By the time he left though, five weeks later, he had become a *cause celebre*. Ten days after his arrival everyone knew his name and even those who knew only that felt qualified to hold a vehement opinion. Families divided and old friends drew daggers on each other. Not since Dreyfus . . . etc. It was a revealing moment for the English conscience. In the first place there was simply a failure of hospitality. We were put out by his uncompromisingly American style. Until Lenny Bruce we had known America through the Coca-colonial accents of Bob Hope and Jerry Lewis . . . tail-fins, juke boxes and Palm Beach shirts. Or at least that was the prism through which we chose to view America, since it served our graceless envy to a tee. It was re-assuring to our faltering pride to regard the country upon which we had so ironically come to depend as a nest of loud mouthed primitives who would, by and by, come round to their original dependence on our mature old-world wisdom. No such luck though and Lenny Bruce, a genuine Americano, firmly established the fact. His language was fast and dirty; quite unapologetic in its obscurity and just as obviously not just a rotten form of the Queen's English. His independent, national argot was a red rag to our gutter patriots and on the first night there came a mournful bellow from the bewildered audience "Why can't you tell us an English joke?" One bellow aside he had a rapturous first

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night. An audience of hand-picked English hipsters went wild over him. George Melly of the *New Statesman* said he was the prophet of the new morality. Tynan re-flipped and the act went on for nearly two hours. Bruce himself was stunned by the acceptance but he was soon to be surprised when the honeymoon began to break up. On the second night fruity cries of "Shame" broke the awkward silence and somewhere in the middle of the act, during some ironic reference to cancer, a portly attorney led his embarrassed family to the door with a cry of "Cancer . . . that's it. Helen, Nicholas . . . he said cancer we're going." A moment later someone threw a penny and then a glass came from nowhere and shattered itself on the back wall. "Who did that," snapped Bruce but the only reply out of the humming silence was another flying goblet. It was like a seance; and Bruce himself seemed dazed, like a medium, in a trance, creating effects, cries and levitations, beyond his and the audiences' control. . . . The whole occasion was weirdly supernatural as if his disturbing routine and the dreamy mesmeric delivery had galvanized some deep communal energy of the darkened audience. It was this necromatic style, as much as the scandalous *things* he had to say which accounted for most of his hectic effect. He is a beat magician, a Yiddish Ariel whose hesitant, mumbling, slipped-gear technique, full of breaks and riffs, untunes the ear of the conventional night-club audience who are used to getting their entertainment in a smooth flow of glossy chatter. He is not a public utility though. He mines his material from odd, irregular veins, surprising himself, as often as not, when he strikes a seam of original humor. This is not to say that his act is all improvised, although its tone and tempo lead one to think it might be. I saw him nearly every night of his London engagement and I began to see how little of the material actually was improvised, in the strictest sense. He has a repertoire of what he calls "bits" and the improvisation consists of the way in which he tacks these together, to create aurora-like assemblies of ideas. He may repeat whole sequences of "bits" from one night to another; but never in the same order and always with different emphases. One bit may be the centerpiece on Monday and on Tuesday may be compressed to an esoteric footnote. Following his act is like reading Finnegan's Wake over and over. During his stint at the Establishment in London he re-inforced this impression by running a tape during every act: then he would re-cap on some of his ideas by asking the stage-manager to run over a section of old tape whilst he stood beside the speaker, nodding wisely at this audio-ghost of his recent self.

He has been called a sick comedian and yet I don't think the label

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could have been applied more inappropriately. He deals, it is true, with sex and disease, sometimes with unsettling frankness, but never with relish or just for kicks. He is a collagist, assembling the fragments of urban consciousness without much regard for conventions or taboo. He is almost a verbal Pop artist, pasting together the thousand sordid images of the urban American imagination. A lot of his material is drawn from films, for which he has a minute and photographic memory, realizing that the modern American mind is nurtured on cineplasm and Disney-food, John Hollander's "B pictures" which "showed us: shooting more real than singing or making love . . . even the patch of sudden white, and inverted letters dashing up during the projectionists daydream, dying quickly—these are the colors of our inner life."

* * *

Anyway what is "sick" humor, surely a pseudo-event created solely in order to be reported . . . an artificial entity, memorably titled, appearing with fictitious suddenness from the typewriters of columnists eager for a drama on which to hang a story. Human nature then being what it is—imitating art, especially when commercially convenient—events soon provided a nice post-hoc confirmation of the original fiction. Performers and magazine editors, always on the look out for a speeding bandwagon, sprinkled their products with harsh, horrible jokes and hey presto; the sickniks were at hand.

This vicious circle of contrived publicity and cynical imitation has hidden the more interesting issues by establishing a misleading impression of unprecedented novelty. The whole question of sick humor is in fact much vaguer, more complex and widely scattered, with long and rather devious roots in the past, both individual and social. It involves, among other things, the problem of the use of irony in setting up the private language of an exclusive coterie. Then there is the question of its connections with "psychiatric" sick humor, seen at its best perhaps in the cartoons of Jules Feiffer. These separate, even if related, strands of common social behavior should be disentangled.

In the early Fifties, a sick vernacular began to make the rounds in bars and cocktail parties. This took the form of riddles, knock-knock jokes and conundrums, often with rather gruesome or sometimes blasphemous themes. Like children's ridicule riddles, these jokes, framed in the form of an apparently innocent question, would shock the victim with an unexpectedly vicious or brutal answer.

With their special twist, these jokes are reminiscent of the Adam and Eve and Pinch Me routines; except that in this case the unsuspecting victim is punished for his ignorance not by a physical assult but by

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an attack on his civilized sensibilities. Like so many traditional children's games they are forms of practical joke, a ritual contest of wits; the victim is closely watched for his reaction. Will he be shocked or will he take it in his stride? Is he a sissy or a square?

> Q. What did the mother say to the child who asked why it kept going round in circles?
> A. Shut up or I'll nail your other foot to the floor.

or

> Knock, knock, who's there?
> Jesus.
> Jesus who?
> (Incredulously) Jesus *who!*

The history of adult fads is often made up of these persistent infantilisms and, as with children, they come and go mysteriously. Yo-yos, knock-knock games, hula-hoops—and now sick jokes. The macabre twist is not new. Children have always experimented, in their games and rhymes, with the uncertain edges of taste and manners.

> *Scabbermatter custard, green phlegm pie.*
> *Toe nail clippings spread on thick*
> *All washed down with a cup of cold sick.*
>
> *What is that mess upon the road that looks*
> *like strawberry jam?*
> *Hush, hush, my dear, 'tis your papa, run over*
> *by a tram.*

The cautionary tales of the Victorian nursery are filled with jaunty horrors. It is as if the sanction of violent physical punishment was softened, excused perhaps, by a jocular form; discipline's Trojan horse, as it were. Children and adults share more jocular idiom than we care to admit and it is not a question of why such childish crudities persist, but why they ever disappear, if they in fact do.

All this bears on the larger issues of squeamishness in general, and on taste, tact and decent manners. Why was it that torture and public execution first offended public feeling? Why, in the eighteenth century, did it become a matter of good manners to carve red meat at a side table, out of sight of the diners; why is cock-fighting barbarous when boxing is the noble art; why are the blind sacred and the deaf absurd? Sick jokes are a primitive, childish way of exploring the outlines of these puzzling moral contours. They discharge the tensions set up

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by the odd and capricious restrictions on human conduct. Sick jokes are saucy, naughty, dare-devil deeds; risky in just the same way that dirty stories were once risqué. They are a game of grandmother's footsteps which the child and the adult plays with the stern figure of society. But they are also just one of the myriad facetious ephemera which serve to cement the human community, along with winks, limericks, back-slaps, rounds of drinks, and the Ballad of Eskimo Nell.

Also, the sick joke serves a special function in establishing ranks and coteries. Just as in school, with Adam and Eve and Pinch Me, they separate the sheep from the goats, the squares from the hipsters. Any joke which offends accepted canons of taste and good manners works by testing the moral flexibility, and hence the sophistication, of the listener. The victim who cannot take the sick, the gruesome, the gaily callous or the blasphemous twist, condemns himself by his own straight face. The joke becomes a password to a self-esteeming coterie.

All sorts of further tricks and turns are then used to refresh the distinction between the elite and the hoi-polloi. The whole "kitsch" business is another good example. Where "high culture" was once a mark of distinction, prestige suffered by the rise of that counterfeit form which Dwight Macdonald calls "midcult." In the panic created by the inflation of the old currency, many people did a somersault in taste and began to give sophisticated attention to "kitsch" of one sort or another. People will abandon their own best selves if they can get special lustre by doing so. Liberal minorities, for example, once they show signs of becoming too (!) popular, set up a sham bigotry of their own and start to make sick jokes which seem to assault their own position. The solitary crusader often resents the converts who, by flocking to his cause, turn him into an undistinctive member of a crowd. The sick joke keeps him one jump ahead of his own, most irritatingly ardent recruit.

And so to the question of irony. When the hip liberal, one who is sensitive, that is, to the clichés of his own dissent, tries to separate himself from the mass of his simpler minded colleagues, he cannot, unless he is ruthlessly cynical, do so without employing the trope of jocular irony. This gives him the best of both worlds. With sick quips "putting down the spades" he can *seem* to stand apart from the liberal herd: seem, to innocent squares, to have gone beyond the boringly obvious liberal formulae, to an icily unattainable sophistication: while still preserving (he can claim) the essential liberal core.

But such a fastidious use of irony topples all but the brave and true. Too often the sick joke celebrates the very prejudice which the

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self-styled liberal claims to hate. It abrades moreover the tender nerves of humanism, coats them in the end with indifference, and as with all jokes, gives a socially acceptable escape from the awkward, boring paradoxes which the sincere tenure of the liberal position necessarily entails. Sick is often a facetious surrender; an exasperated, necessarily witty, *Je m'en foueism*, in the face of the intolerable moral complexities of certain modern issues.

Take the Eichmann episode, for example; here was a tissue of ethical conflict, fraught with moral contradictions—the question of Eichmann's guilt, of Jewish revenge, and the quality of mercy. It all called for a cool head and a strong heart. As it was, the trial threw off a shower of sick jokes—"We're going to release you . . . on probation" and so on. These jokes, which studiously avoided committing the hipster to any of the clichés of liberal tolerance, served in the end to inflame the sleeping prejudices of everyone concerned. The jocular form let the violence and the prejudice out in disguise. Similarly, during the Congo crisis, jokes about finding the missing Lumumba—by X-raying Kasavubu—allowed out, in the disguise of irony, the genuine half-formed thought, which no self-respecting liberal could allow himself to say, unless he did so smiling, that *all* black men eat each other.

Sick humor, as a betrayal, is not unique to our time, nor even *in* our time. The Hellfire club was simply Satan in the service of snobbery. In our day, with its fierce scramble for distinction and exclusive rank, commitment and dedication have become drab in proportion to their popularity. "Sick" is just one among a number of black narcissisms.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Here is smart satanism if you like, and it is sad that such a counterfeit should get by when Bruce is relegated to a smutty curiosity on the night club pages of Variety. It has all the withered, faggish vindictiveness which passes for satire; and yet for all its displays of sexual honesty, its "hip" paraphernalia of phantom pregnancies, impotence and besotted disillusion, it's as weary and prurient as the very abuses which it tries to put down. George Orwell has the measure of this sort of product in his essay on Dali. He says, in essence, that the mediocre talent can make its way by peddling in evil. On the basis of the simple cliché that all human motives are suspect, that what is deep is necessarily dirty, plays like this can gain acceptance by simply painting everything in the darkest possible colors. But this is only an inverted sentimentality, produced by simply black-washing a soap-opera. For all its brittle brutal patter this sort of thing is really not much more than *I Love Lucy* for Channel 13.

There is no black narcissism in Bruce, though. He is not just a

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snobbish satanist although many of his followers get a lot of satisfaction imagining themselves as members of a new Hellfire aristocracy. Bruce himself is too much of a naive, too innocent in a sense to get much of a social charge from his own ironies. He is really some sort of grubby simpleton whose very lack of sophistication lets him squint through the tissues of modern hypocrisy. He plays the bewildered rural innocent rather than the knowing urban cynic and his encounters with the absurdities of prejudice derive more force from this tone of untutored astonishment than they would from those glib ironies which come so easily out of initiated *Weltschmertz*. It is refreshing to enjoy this ignorant amazement as he draws up short in the face of color bars, prudishness, and all the other self-lacerating hypocrisies with which America is so unnecessarily tortured. He can exorcise, by astonishment alone, the black magic of four letter words. He simply goes on reciting them at his stunned audiences until the words are emptied of their meaning. Then in a mood of ecstatic re-appraisal he re-charges them with joyful and entirely shameless significance. "You only want me for my body," he mincingly mimics some tendentious broad. "For what nicer thing *could* I want you," he snaps back with startling simplicity. This almost brash simplification often offends those who would otherwise be his most enthusiastic ally. But then he is not preaching to the converted. He rises to the occasion best of all in the conventional niteries where the bull-necked men from out of town are stung to uncontrollable fury by his gadfly innocence. "That's not very funny. Or perhaps I'm just too old to understand this sort of thing. Tell me, is it funny?" Bruce is really Peter Pan, who makes a therapeutic virtue of his failure to grow up, and one really doesn't have to be very new-fashioned to appreciate him. Nostalgic rather, like the romantic poets who out of their childhood suck up joy and a capacity for shocked amazement, surely the best prophylactic against callousness and bored indifference.

Jonathan Miller

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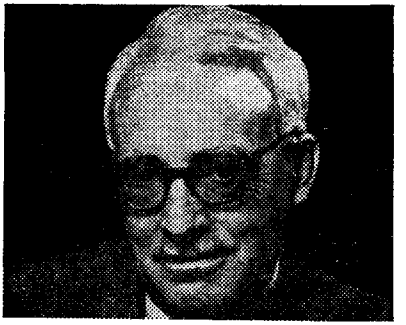

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